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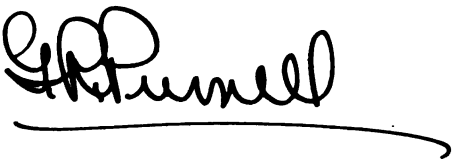

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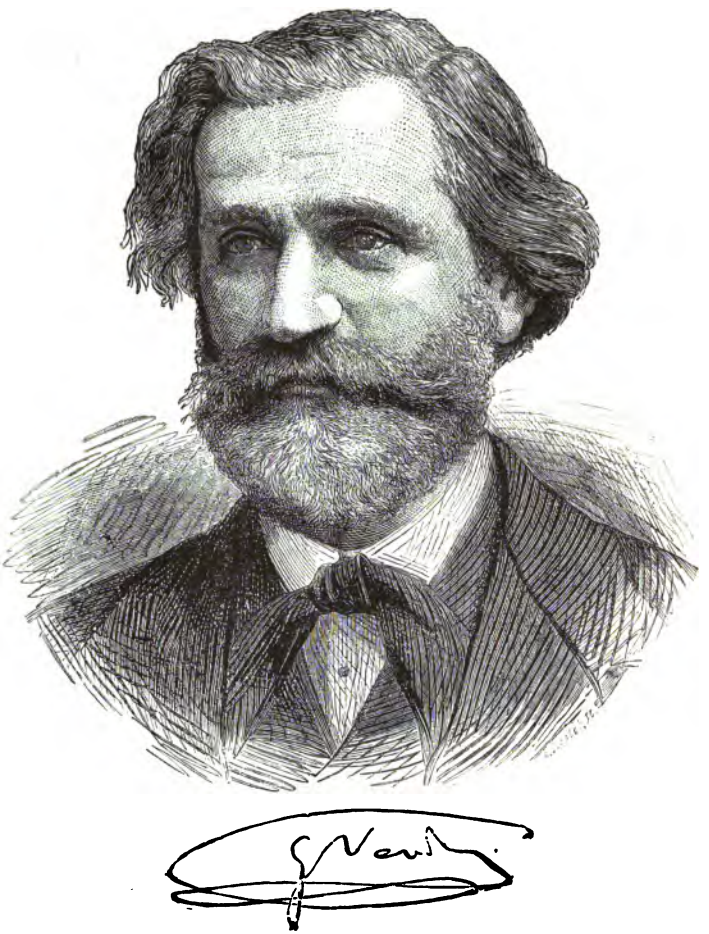

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VERDI:

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VERDI:

AN ANECDOTIC HISTORY OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY

ARTHUR POUGIN.

With Portrait and Facsimile.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

JAMES E. MATTHEW.

LONDON:
H. GREVEL & CO., 33, KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN.
1887.

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PREFACE.

WHEN some years back I published, in a special magazine,[1] the first version of this work, the attention of the public abroad was at once awakened on the subject. A German newspaper, the *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung*, immediately gave a translation of it; a Spanish serial, the *Cronica de la Musica*, also did so; important selections from it were translated in an English periodical; and, finally, the publication of an Italian translation was at once put in hand. The brilliant personal character of an artist such as Verdi naturally excited interest, and the information, both copious and previously unpublished, which I brought together concerning this artist and his works, could not fail to increase it.

But yet my first work was very far from having the importance and the development

[1] [Viz., in the Paris musical journal *Le Ménestrel* for the year 1878.]

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which I have now given it. In the course of my reading, of my journeys into Italy, of my intercourse with various artists, fellow-countrymen of the master, I had taken note of a number of details absolutely unknown in France, often indeed in his own country. I had thus laid under contribution, at Milan, Signor Giulio Ricordi, son of Verdi's intelligent publisher; Signor Mazzucato, the eminent director of the Conservatoire; Signor Filippo Filippi, the learned musical critic of *La Perseveranza;* at Florence, Signor Casamorata, director of the Musical Institute; at Naples, my excellent and obliging *confrère* Signor Carlo Caputo, etc., etc. In short, combining all that I had obtained in this manner with the notes which I had taken during several years from the political and artistic journals of Italy, as well as from various less ephemeral works, I found myself in possession of a considerable series of documents, full of interest and novelty, about the illustrious master, who is, in truth, the last representative of the grand art of his country.[1]

[1] In addition to what I have thus borrowed from different Italian journals, I have put under contribution an excellent work by Signor Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle Opere di*

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But beyond this I had the good fortune to be assisted in my labours by the very lively and very accurate recollections of an excellent and distinguished artist, who had lived for many years on intimate terms with Verdi, the only pupil trained by the master, who has maintained for him the warmest and the most touching affection. This artist is Signor Emanuele Muzio, an estimable composer and a skilful *chef d'orchestre*, to whom the composer of *Aïda* has often entrusted the direction of his works, and who, frequently associated very closely with his artistic existence, was in a position to give me much information of great accuracy on a crowd of facts entirely unknown, or which had never been collected together. The obliging aid of Signor Muzio was far too useful for me not to profit by it largely; I have

Giuseppe Verdi; a short account by Signor Ghislanzoni, *La Casa di Verdi a Sant'-Agata* (in a little volume entitled *Reminiscenze Artistiche*); some notes from another work of the same writer, *Gli Artisti da Teatro;* and especially a series of articles full of interest published about Verdi in an Italian journal at Nice, *Il Pensiero di Nizza*. The articles, the author of which, Signor Ercole Cavalli, was born at Busseto, in the country where the master passed his childhood and youth, appeared in the numbers of the *Pensiero* of December 29th, 30th, and 31st, 1876, and January 4th, 1877.

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not failed to do so, and I now thank him warmly for it.

When the first publication of this work was completed, one of my Italian *confrères*, Signor Jacques Caponi, who is the well-known correspondent in Paris of several of the newspapers of his country, among others of the *Fanfulla* and of the *Perseveranza*, asked my permission to publish an Italian translation of it, to which he proposed to add much important and unpublished information. I willingly granted him this permission, and by a scruple of exactness, Signor Caponi (who on this occasion preserved his ordinary pseudonym of *Folchetto*) published his translation, preserving faithfully the original text, adding only in the very abundant notes the new and interesting facts which he had to relate. I have no need to say with what success this *Vita Aneddotica di Giuseppe Verdi*, thus offered by Signor Caponi, was received in Italy, and to what extent the national self-love was flattered by it. But when at length I wished to give to my work the more solid and more permanent form of a book, I in turn begged Signor Caponi to give me permission

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to avail myself of his numerous and very valuable notes. However, I entirely recast my work, in order to avoid the incessant interruption of my narration by notes, the substance of which found its place naturally in the text itself; and not confining myself to this, I still further augmented it by the information which I had never ceased collecting. In this form I now offer it to the public, with the hope that it may be found of interest.

The history of the life of a great artist, whatever opinion one may have of his genius, whatever reserve even some may wish to make with regard to this or that of his works, is always worthy of attention. But it would be dangerous for a writer, when that artist is still living, to pretend to express a judgment more or less formal, more or less elaborated, on the nature of his genius and on his complete career. In addition to the fact that this career may not be terminated, that new works may consequently offer to criticism new elements for forming a judgment, may destroy or considerably tone down the effect of certain somewhat hasty opinions, the mind of the writer is

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unable, in spite of his good faith and of his good intentions, to have sufficient independence to isolate himself sufficiently to pronounce, with full knowledge of the grounds of judgment, and with perfect confidence, either in the direction of eulogy, or in that of blame. Posterity alone, it cannot be too often repeated, is able to assign their true place to great men and great geniuses. To speak especially of Verdi, the critic who may have claimed to form a judgment of his complete work and position after his first great compositions and his first great successes, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, would no doubt be rather out of countenance at present, in face of the development which the artist has given to his genius in writing *Aïda* and the *Requiem* for Manzoni.

It will be needless then to seek in the pages composing this volume any critical judgment; for, of deliberate purpose, this the author has absolutely denied himself. This is, as the title points out, nothing else than "an anecdotic history" of the life and works of Verdi. My very modest and limited aim has been to give an account of the man and the artist, without

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wishing to discuss in any way the value of his works. It seemed to me that such a work, without going into personal opinions, might be wanting neither in interest nor utility, and I only hope that the reader will be good enough to grant to it a little of the indulgence of which he has kindly given proof with regard to those which I have already offered to him.

A. P.

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THE LIFE AND WORKS OF VERDI.

ABOUT sixteen miles from Parma, in the ancient duchy of that name, barely a league from Busseto, a small town of three or four thousand, situated at the foot of the Apennines, lies a poor and miserable village called Le Roncole, numbering scarcely two hundred inhabitants. There, rather more than sixty years ago, lived an honest and industrious young couple, who kept, in the only street of that village, a poor *osteria*, to the produce of which they added the profits of a small traffic in grocery and liquors, to which the inhabitants of the country and the *contadini* of the neighbourhood resorted to lay in their stores.

One day, this poor district, so unknown and retired, which was usually so quiet that it might well think itself out of the reach of passing events, became the theatre of a scene of carnage and desolation, of a bloody and terrible drama.

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It was the year 1814, the epoch of the reverses of the French arms. The Austrians and the Russians, before whom Prince Eugène, after prodigies of valour, was compelled eventually to retreat, had invaded Italy, which thus became once again, as it had been in ages past, a field of battle. They advanced in serried columns, laying waste the countries on their track, scattering mourning and ruin, terror and death, wherever they passed. The Russian soldiers especially made themselves conspicuous by their cruelty and savage fierceness, destroying everything, massacring the inhabitants without pity, men and women, children and old people, burning houses and farms, sacking towns and country houses, leaving nothing standing which it was possible to destroy.

Suddenly it was reported one morning that they had arrived close to the unfortunate village, on which they were marching. Beside themselves at this report, and overcome with terror, the women of Le Roncole, not knowing whither to fly or how to put themselves in safety, took refuge with their children in the modest and only church of the hamlet, hoping thus to escape the barbarity of this wild soldiery. But, respecting nothing, the Russians, after ransacking the dwellings, forced their way

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into the church itself, the floor of which was soon reddened with the blood of their victims.

One of these women, holding her son to her breast, had the presence of mind, in the midst of the screams, the uproar, and the confusion, to fling herself on to the staircase without being seen, and to clamber up to the belfry. Huddled up in a corner, half mad with terror, scarcely daring either to breathe or to stir, she remained till everything was over, and thus she was saved, with her child.

The poor *contadina* who escaped this horrible massacre as by a miracle was the same who, with her husband, kept the *osteria* of the village of Le Roncole. The name of the latter was Carlo Verdi, and the son of these two peasants —the little Giuseppe, who for a second time owed his life to his mother—was the future composer of *Nabucco* and of *La Traviata*, of *Rigoletto*, of *Aïda*, and of the *Requiem* Mass.

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CHAPTER I.

Birth of Verdi.—His father a simple *locandiere*.—His precocious intelligence.—How he acquired his love of music.—His first studies with the organist of his village.—He becomes organist himself.—He is sent to Busseto, where he finds a protector.

THE very circumstance which has just been briefly related, and which to the present day had remained entirely unknown, renders it a matter of certainty that all the biographers of Verdi, without exception, have fallen into error in fixing the place of his birth at Busseto, and the date of it as the 9th October, 1814. I had already corrected this assertion, and had thought it possible to establish as a fact that the great artist was born at Le Roncole on the 9th October, 1813. I was, however, myself slightly in error. The truth is that it was on the 10th October, 1813, that Verdi saw the day at Le Roncole. The accuracy of this last date is attested by an authentic document of recent publication, which is in a special degree curious. This document, brought to light by the *Gazetta Musicale* of Milan,[1] is

[1] In its number of the 20th July, 1884.

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Verdi

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no other than the certificate of birth of the master, drawn up *in French* and transcribed by the deputy of the mayor of Busseto, whose signature it bears. To explain this peculiarity, it must be remembered that Italy was then under French rule. The little village of Le Roncole, a dependency of the commune of Busseto, formed part of the ancient duchy of Parma; but the territory of Italy having been since the conquest formed into departments, to which had been given the title of 'Departements au delà des Alpes,' Busseto was comprised in that of Taro.[1]

Here, then, is the exact text of the certificate of birth of Verdi, extracted from the registers of the *état civil* of the commune of Busseto for the year 1813:—

L'an mil huit cent treize, le jour douze d' octobre, à neuf heures du matin, par devant nous adjoint au maire de Busseto, officier de l'état civil de la commune de Busseto susdit, département du Taro, est comparu Verdi Charles, âgé de vingt-huit ans, aubergiste, domicilié à Roncole, lequel nous a présenté un enfant du sexe masculin, né le jour dix du courant à huit heures du soir, de lui déclarant et de la Louise Utini, fileuse, domiciliée à Roncole, son épouse, et auquel il a déclaré vouloir donner les prénoms de Joseph-Fortunin-François. Les dites déclaration et présentation faites

[1] This department took its name from the Taro, a torrent which flows a short distance from Parma.

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en présence de Romanelli Antoine, âgé de cinquante-un ans, huissier de la mairie, et Cantù Hiacinte, âgé de soixante-un ans, concierge, domiciliés à Busseto, et, après en avoir donné lecture du présent acte au comparant et témoins, ont signé avec nous.

ANTONIO ROMANELLI.

GIACINTO CANTÙ.

VERDI CARLO.

VITOLI, adjoint.

(TRANSLATION.)

In the year one thousand eight hundred and thirteen, the twelfth day of October, at nine o'clock in the morning, before us deputy of the mayor of Busseto, officer of the *état civil* of the commune of Busseto aforesaid, department of Taro, appeared Verdi Charles, aged twenty-eight years, innkeeper, domiciled at Roncole, who presented to us a child, of the male sex, born the tenth day of the present month, at eight o'clock in the evening, of him the deponent and of Louisa Utini, spinner, domiciled at Roncole, his wife, and to whom he has declared that he wishes to give the forenames of Joseph-Fortunin-François. The said declaration and presentation made in the presence of Romanell Antoine, aged fifty-one years, usher of the *mairie*, and Cantù Hiacinte, aged sixty-one years, doorkeeper, domiciled at Busseto, and the present document having been read over to the deponent and witnesses, they have signed with us.[1]

[1] In addition to the fact that the document which has just been read fixes in the most certain manner the birth of Verdi on the 10th October, 1813, it is evident that Verdi, for whom no other name than Giuseppe has been ever known, received also, under the *état civil*, those of Fortunin-François.

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We have seen that the father and mother of Verdi kept a modest inn in the village of Le Roncole, so modest, indeed, that the profits were far from sufficing for the wants of the little family; for this reason they had thought well to add to it a sort of little trade in groceries, in retailing liquors, coffee, sugar, tobacco, and other wares of the same character. Every week Carlo Verdi went off to Busseto to obtain the stores which he required. He bought them of an excellent man, Antonio Barezzi, who kept a grocery warehouse and a manufacture of liquors. He returned on foot, carrying on his shoulders the two baskets which he brought back to the village. This Antonio Barezzi, of whom we shall have to speak farther on, was destined to occupy in the future a large place in the existence of Verdi.

Brought up by his mother, who adored him, the child was by nature intelligent, quiet, and obedient; serious beyond his age, and of a timid and reserved disposition, it was rarely necessary to punish, seldom even to correct him. One thing alone lifted him out of himself, and gave him unequalled joy; this was music, and the sounds which proceeded from any musical instrument. A poor wretch of a travelling musician, whose name has been preserved—he was called Bagasset—came from time to time to

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Le Roncole in the exercise of his modest calling. Thin, poverty-stricken, unfortunate, with a long body which two sticks of legs barely supported, shivering with the cold of winter under his miserable rags, he was fain to take refuge in the stables to warm himself a little. But when, to collect an audience, he took up a position before the little inn of Le Roncole, the tones which he sawed out of a wretched violin charmed the little Verdi till he nearly fell into ecstasy. The musician soon noticed the delight which the child showed in hearing him, and often came expressly on his account, sometimes accompanied by one of his companions, who played the violoncello. It is affirmed that this obscure *virtuoso* was the first to advise Verdi's father to make his son study music.[1]

It is known that listening to military bands caused the love of music to spring up in Lesueur; we have seen by what means the same result was produced in Verdi. But by what miracle of chance did the child of the

[1] Thirty years later, in 1849, when Verdi bought his estate of Sant'-Agata, he still found in the country poor Bagasset, grown old, and still giving himself up to the exercise of his *art*. He appeared from time to time before the villa, and endeavoured with his violin to renew his ancient exploits. Verdi would then have him called in, order him something to eat, and never allow him to leave without a present of money nor without some slight provisions in his pocket. The old man used to thank him with the words, "Ah! maestro, I saw you when you were very little; but now——"

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locandiere of Le Roncole find himself from his earliest years in possession of a spinet, and with the opportunity of exercising his little fingers on a keyboard? This we shall see in good time. The fact is nevertheless certain, since Verdi has preserved this instrument, and that a date fixes the time at which he used it. One of his *collaborateurs*, Signor Ghislanzoni, has given precise details on this subject, at the same time describing the house which sheltered the early years of the master.

"The house where Verdi was born is about three miles distant from Busseto. I visited it with profound emotion. Imagine a kind of tumbledown house of stone and mortar, standing almost alone in the midst of a fertile plain sown with maize and hemp. We can understand how an artist born in such a spot should preserve for the whole of his life a love of solitude. A few steps from this humble cottage, in which, at the present day, a thrifty woman sells wine every Sunday to the *contadini* of the neighbourhood, rises a church of majestic and handsome architecture. In this church, at the age of fifteen years, the young student of Busseto played the organ incessantly, intoxicating his ardent mind with mystic inspirations. From the organ and the church he went to the spinet in his father's house, and a whole world

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of hopes, illusions, sublime visions, surrounded the pale youth in that straitened dwelling, a sort of oasis lost in a desert of interminable plains.

"I was shown the little room where this child of promise dwelt. Later on, at the villa of Sant'-Agata, I also saw the first instrument on which his youthful fingers practised. This deserving spinet no longer has any strings, and has lost its lid. Its finger-board is like the jawbone of a skull, with long and worn-out teeth. But for all that, what a precious monument! What recollections for the artist who shed on it the fruitful tears of a troubled youth! What sublime emotions for him who sees it and questions it!

"And I did question it. I lifted up one of the hammers[1] of the keyboard, which afforded a glimpse of written characters, and was able to read words as simple as they were sublime, words which, while they revealed the generous act of a tradesman, seemed also at the same time a conscious prophecy. My readers will thank me for reproducing here this inscription in its textual simplicity. I should think myself guilty of a profanation if I corrected the trifling

[1] There seems to be some vagueness in this statement. A spinet has no hammers, the strings being put in vibration by the plucking of the quill, or piece of leather, on the "jack."—J. E. M.

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inaccuracies of orthography which make it sacred :—

" ' Da me Stefano Cavaletti fu fato di nuovo questi saltarelli, e impenati a corame, e vi adatai la pedagliera che io ci ho regalato ; come anche gratuitamente ci ho fato di nuovo li detti saltarelli, vedendo la buona disposizione che ha il giovinetto Giuseppe Verdi d'imparare a suonare questo istrumento, che questo mi basta par esserne del tutto sodisfatto.—Anno Domini 1821.' "[1]

It is evident, then, that Verdi studied music from his tenderest infancy, since in 1821, the year when an accommodating and benevolent tradesman kindly put in order for his use an instrument past service, he was scarcely eight years of age. He was only seven when, under the following circumstances, he gave the first proof of the influence which music exercised upon his young mind.

It was on a fête day, and he was helping as choir-boy at mass in the little church of Le Roncole. The mass was accompanied on the

[1] *Reminiscenze Artistiche.* The following is a translation of this inscription :—

" By me, Stefano Cavaletti, were made anew and releathered the jacks of this instrument, to which I have adapted a pedal. I made these jacks gratuitously in consideration of the good disposition which the young Giuseppe Verdi shows in learning to play on the said instrument, which quite suffices to satisfy me —Anno Domini 1821."

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organ, which he heard for the first time. At the sound of this harmony, then so new to him, the child remained positively in ecstasy. Just at the moment when the priest asked him for the water—"Acqua!"—Verdi was so completely absorbed that he did not hear him. The priest, therefore, repeated "Acqua!" and Verdi remained deaf. At last a third demand remaining without result, this brutal man, to awake him from his torpor, gave the poor child such a push that he sent him rolling down the three steps of the altar. The fall was so violent that the child fainted, and had to be carried into the sacristy. When he came to himself, and was able to be taken home to his parents, what does the reader suppose he did, instead of complaining and crying, as many others would have done in his place? He renewed a request which he had already made to his father, and begged him to allow him to learn music. The worthy man granted the request this time; and it was then that he bought of an old priest, in whose possession it had been for many years, the spinet the history of which has just been read.

In this manner his musical education was begun.

The only church of Le Roncole, as we have seen, possessed an organ, which was in the hands of an old artist named Baistrocchi. The

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parents of the young Verdi, seeing the precocious love of their child for music, thought that in confiding him to the care of this worthy man, he might also become an organist, and —who knows?—might some day replace his old master in the service of the parish! Their ambition went no farther, and their only hope was that their son might, at the end of a few years, help the family, which, in addition to the father and mother, comprised a daughter also.[1] The organist of Le Roncole was, therefore, the earliest master of the future composer of *Nabucco*, and first made his little fingers travel along the keys of the famous spinet.[2]

After three years only of study, the progress of the child had been sufficiently rapid to enable him, as his friends hoped, to get the appointment to the little organ of Le Roncole. However, at the end of a short time, his father, anxious for his future, and desiring to

[1] This sister of Verdi died young, at the time when he was completing his musical education in Milan.

[2] This spinet is fertile in recollections. The following anecdote is also related. From the very beginning of his musical studies, Verdi worked with an ardour which it is difficult to conceive. When he was not in his master's presence, he amused himself, without quite knowing what he was about, in finding harmonies on the keyboard. One day he fell into a kind of joyous stupefaction on stumbling by chance on the perfect chord of C major. The next day, try and try as he might, he could not hit again on the three notes which the evening before had given him such delight. Furious and exasperated at the uselessness of his efforts, he

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give him at least elementary instruction, which he was unable to obtain in the village, formed the resolution of sending him to Busseto to enable him to attend a school. It was a great sacrifice for the poor man, who was far from being in good circumstances. Happily for the child, there lived at Busseto a cobbler, a fellow-countryman and friend of his father, who was known by the familiar name of *Pugnatta;* this excellent workman consented to board and take charge of him for the moderate recompense of thirty centimes a day. Young Verdi was therefore despatched to the care of Pugnatta, at the same time as another big boy of the village, called Michiara.

Immediately on his arrival at Busseto the child began to go to school. Grave, studious, and thoughtful, he gave his mind to his work only, from which nothing could divert him; he hardly ever took part in the games of his companions. Moreover, in spite of his com-

took a hammer and set to work knocking with redoubled blows on the poor instrument, which at least was not to blame. At the noise which he made, his father appeared, and seeing what was going on, to divert him from so interesting an occupation, gave him one of those well-intentioned corrections which at that time formed part of the general system of education of children, thus promptly relieving the overstrained nerves of the precocious and too impatient harmonist. It is, perhaps, as a sequel to this incident that the worthy Cavaletti lavished his cares on the poor spinet, which in truth must have been in great want of them.

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parative separation, he had not given up his duties as organist, so that every Sunday and feast-day he went on foot to Le Roncole to perform his duty to the parish.[1] His salary was small, and including the fees for marriages, baptisms, and funerals, amounted to scarcely more than a hundred francs per annum;[2] but to this salary must be added, according to a custom still in force at that time, the proceeds of a collection which he himself made for his own benefit at the time of the harvest of corn and maize. It was while travelling thus from Busseto to Le Roncole for the duties of his church that one day he narrowly escaped perishing in a singular manner. It was Christmas, and he was going to play mass at dawn. Compelled to start long before daybreak to get over the distance which separated him from Le Roncole, the boy walked with difficulty in the midst of a thick darkness, having no other guide than his acquaintance with the road. In the darkness of the night, he did not see a deep

[1] From his eleventh to his eighteenth year—that is to say, up to the moment when he repaired to Milan to complete his studies—Verdi did not cease to occupy the position and to perform his modest duties as organist of Le Roncole.

[2] From the registers of the church of Le Roncole it appears that the *fixed* salary granted to Verdi was thirty-six francs a year. At the end of the first year, in consequence of the applications of his father, this salary was raised to forty francs!

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ditch which partly barred his passage; he stumbled, fell into the ditch, which was then full of water, and struck by the cold, benumbed, shivering, became exhausted in unavailing attempts to get out. His strength was nearly spent, when, fortunately, a peasant woman, passing not far from the spot, heard his cries and groans. She ran to him, took steps to help him, and, not without difficulty, was able at last to pull the poor child out of the water. Without the succour of that woman, Verdi would undoubtedly have died under those circumstances, and Italy would have numbered one great artist the less.

After a sojourn of two years at Busseto, of which the boy had made good use, he could read, write, and cipher, without having for one moment ceased to employ himself with music; in addition to this, he showed himself so reasonable, that, thanks to his connection with the merchant Antonio Barezzi, who, as I have already said, carried on a distillery and manufacture of liquors, his father was able to obtain for him a modest post with that worthy and excellent man. His entering into that house was a happy chance for him, and decided his future.

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CHAPTER II.

Verdi employed in Barezzi's warehouse.—His new master, the organist and *maître de chapelle* Provesi.—His rapid progress.—He begins to compose.—He obtains a bursary to enable him to go and continue his studies in Milan.

BUSSETO is a small town, peopled by about three thousand inhabitants, who have always, it is said, displayed an ardent passion for music. To prove this, the author of the *History of Parma*, Ireneo Affo, relates that when the Emperor Charles V. and Pope Paul III. had a meeting at Busseto, the *dilettanti* of the town went to meet them, and welcomed with the aid of music the arrival of the august personages. The painter Biaggio Martini has recalled this fact in a painting which is in the museum of Parma. At a later time, during the seventeenth century, when a dreadful plague was decimating Italy, the inhabitants of Busseto were attacked with special severity by the scourge, which reduced the population by nearly one half. A touching action resulted: those who were dying without heirs formed the idea of consecrating their possessions to the founda-

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tion of a 'Monte di Pietà,' intended, in the first place, for the relief of the poor, and, secondly, to offer facilities for the study of the sciences and fine arts to a certain number of young people who showed promise. For this purpose several bursaries were created in favour of a certain number of children of poor families, who, having made their preliminary studies in the country, would be able in due course to repair to the university to study, according to their vocation and abilities, medicine, law, mathematics, painting, or music.

Thanks to this wise liberality, young Verdi became in due course one of the *protégés* of the Monte di Pietà of Busseto; but it must be added that it is above all to the help and affection of Antonio Barezzi, his excellent master, and to the facilities of all sorts which he found at his house for the study of music, that he owed the possibility of becoming a great artist.[1]

[1] The *Monte di Pietà e d'Abbondanza di Busseto* disposed of four bursaries in favour of the same number of poor children who were desirous of entering upon a liberal career. One of those bursaries was granted to Verdi when it was proposed to send him to complete his musical education at Milan. In 1876, having become the great artist which he now is, the composer wished to testify his gratitude to the foundation which had come to his assistance; for this purpose he presented it with a yearly endowment of one thousand francs, for the purpose of bringing up to five the number of bursaries which the Monte di Pietà had at its disposal.

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Barezzi himself was a great amateur of music; he practised it with enthusiasm, performing the part of first flute in the orchestra of the cathedral of Busseto; he had a knowledge of all the wind instruments, and played especially with some skill on the clarinet, the horn, and the ophicleide; his house was the place of meeting of the Philharmonic Society of the town, of which he was the president and supporter, and of which the *maître de chapelle* Giovanni Provesi, organist of the cathedral, was conductor; in fact, it was at his house that the rehearsals were held, that the studies of the Society were prepared, and it was in the large hall of the house that the concerts and grand musical meetings were given.

It is easy to conceive that, living in such a house, the imagination of the young Verdi would be remarkably stirred up in surroundings so agreeable to his wishes, his inclinations, and his aspirations. Soon, and that without in any way neglecting the duty with which he was charged, he busied himself with music, applied himself to listening attentively to all that went on at Barezzi's, and at last took to transcribing and copying scores with so much ardour and assiduity, that he attracted the attention of his master and of old Provesi, who had formed an affection for him. The poor spinet, the

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history of which we are familiar with, was made to suffer martyrdom, so much so that Barezzi, seeing his ardour, and considering this instrument too imperfect, allowed him to practise on an excellent pianoforte of the manufacturer Fritz, of Vienna, which served for the studies of his daughter. (In this way Verdi formed the acquaintance of the young Margarita Barezzi, who, some years later, was destined to become his wife.) As for old Provesi, who was, it appears, a pleasing composer and a very skilful contrapuntist, charmed with the precocious intelligence of the boy and with his love for the art, he offered to give him lessons, and to help him thus to continue his musical education.

We may well believe that Verdi did not want twice asking. Moreover, he fell into good hands. The organist Provesi was a distinguished artist, and at the same time a man of cultivation. Author and poet, as well as an excellent musician, he had written both words and music of several comic operas, one or two of which had been performed at Busseto. It is affirmed that it was Provesi who urged Verdi on the path where the latter was to meet with glory, and the friends of art owe him gratitude for the awakening thus given to a genius probably still unconscious of its own

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existence. Having once become the pupil of Provesi, Verdi gave himself up to study with a zeal and an ardour which nothing could quench. He worked 'double tides,' and to such good purpose that at the end of two or three years Provesi frankly declared that his pupil knew more than he did, and that he could no longer teach him anything. "He will go far," added he, "and one day become a great master!" The youth was then approaching his sixteenth year, and Provesi, whose age began to forbid great exertion, made him take his place in the direction of the Philharmonic Society. Under these circumstances, Verdi began to write numerous pieces for the use of this Society; he composed, scored, and copied them himself, afterwards conducted the practices of his orchestra, and directed the execution of the performances. The pieces in question are still preserved in the philharmonic archives of Busseto. At the same time, Provesi frequently made use of Verdi to take his place at the organ of the cathedral.[1]

[1] One of the strangest duties which Verdi had to fulfil for the service of the Philharmonic Society of Busseto was to teach the viola part to a member of that Association, blind from his birth, who for that reason was called Donnino il Cieco. A musician by intuition, a surprising extempore player, this artist is said to have played admirably on the organ, and to have astonished his audience as long as he remained seated at the instrument. Verdi had the patience to play to him on

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But a small town like Busseto could no longer offer the elements necessary for the activity of an ambitious young artist who wished to make his way. This he soon understood, and opened his mind on the subject to his two protectors, Barezzi and Provesi, who loved him as their own son. Milan was no great distance, Milan the musical town *par excellence* of Upper Italy—the great city, bustling and active, the musical life of which is so intense and so comprehensive. It was proposed that Verdi should betake himself to that town, settle there, and complete his studies. Barezzi took upon himself to make the means easy for him, and it was then that, thanks to him, the administration of the Monte di Pietà awarded to the young composer one of the bursaries which it had at its disposal; it consented even in his favour to modify its customs by doubling the amount of this bursary, thus raising it from three to six hundred francs *per annum*, but promising it for two years only, instead of for four, which was the usual duration.

his spinet the viola part of the works which were to be performed till he knew it by heart, and thus put him in a position to play the overtures of the *Barbiere*, *Cenereulota*, and divers other works, and even the classical quartets, without missing a note.

The person who related this circumstance to me added that Donnino il Cieco died young of disease of the lungs, and, in spite of his infirmity, a victim of his love of drink.

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Nevertheless, as that amount even was insufficient, the excellent Barezzi provided from his own funds for the other wants of his *protégé*, and advanced him the money necessary for the payment of his board and lessons in the great Lombard city.[1] Further, as he had a friend there especially devoted to him, Giuseppe Seletti, professor at the Gymnase, nephew of a canon of Busseto, he recommended Verdi warmly to his protection, and the latter started for Milan, where he was received with open arms by Seletti, who took him into his own house, and would not hear of his living elsewhere.[2]

[1] Verdi made it his duty some years after to reimburse Barezzi to the full, with the first money he was able to earn.

[2] The son of this excellent man, Signor Emilio Seletti, who is still living, and continues to occupy the house (Via Santa Maria, No. 19) in which his father rendered hospitality to young Verdi, has preserved the arrangement of the room which the latter occupied, with all its furniture.

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CHAPTER III.

Arrival in Milan.—Verdi presents himself to the Conservatoire, where he is not admitted.—He becomes a pupil of Lavigna, *chef d'orchestre* of the theatre of La Scala.—He writes marches, overtures, cantatas, etc.

SCARCELY arrived in Milan, having had time only to get such information as was necessary, Verdi presented himself at the entrance examinations of the Conservatoire, at that time directed by the veteran Francesco Basily. Whatever may have been the worth of that distinguished artist, it is well known that he was absolutely deficient in fire, imagination, and musical passion, and that he was much more of a dry professor and rigid theorist, than an artist in the high and noble sense of the word. We must not, therefore, be unreasonably astonished to learn that he was incapable of discovering the aptitude of the future composer; and, in fact, young Verdi found himself repulsed without ceremony, on the pretext that he showed no musical disposition. Fétis, unwilling to allow that Basily could be mistaken in these circumstances, has given

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reasons in justification of his decision which are at least remarkable.

"It is almost certain," says he, "that Basily sought for some indication of artistic faculties in the appearance of Verdi; *for it is by such indications that the principal of a school can in most cases form an opinion on the chances of the future of a candidate.* But it is evident to any person who has seen the composer of *Rigoletto* and *Trovatore*, or even a portrait of him, that never did the physiognomy of a composer in a less degree reveal talent. That icy exterior, that impassibility of feature and bearing, those thin lips, that *ensemble* of steel, might well indicate intelligence; a diplomatist might be hidden beneath it; but no one could discover in it the passionate impulses of the mind which alone preside over the creation of the grand works of the most inspiring of the arts."

Here I do not argue; I relate and I copy, but with difficulty repress a smile.

It appears, in fact, that Fétis, far from being surprised that Basily was unable to discover in Verdi the making of an artist, seems to find his error sufficiently natural, and that he explains it by means of reasoning which is at least singular. Certain friends of Basily have, however, thought it necessary to protest against the

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part which Fétis attributes to him in this matter. Among others, one of them, Signor R. Paravicini, himself a distinguished artist, has written the following letter on this subject[1] :—

MILAN, *October 5th*, 1880.

VERY DEAR SIR,—I see with infinite pleasure that the publisher Ricordi is about to bring out shortly a biography of Giuseppe Verdi, with notes and additions, by Folchetto.[2]

My object in writing these lines is to express the desire, the hope, that the right-minded Folchetto may be able at last to give the lie to the ridiculous tale started by Fétis that the old and esteemed *maestro* Basily, ex-censor of the Conservatoire of Music at Milan, could have found Verdi unworthy to be admitted into that institution.

According to the evidence, the celebrated Verdi was born in 1813, and, thanks to the generous aid of Barezzi, went for the first time to Milan in 1833. He had, therefore, completed, or was on the point of completing, his twentieth year.

The law then in force at the Conservatoire provided: —"From nine to fourteen years of age, admission; at twenty years of age, departure." "The application of Verdi dates in 1833, as all the biographies state" (says Signor Biaggi in the journal *La Nazione*, No. 49, of

[1] This letter was addressed to Signor Caponi, the translator of the first version of the present work, at the moment when the latter was preparing to publish at Milan this translation, the original of which had quite naturally excited the attention of Italians.

[2] Folchetto is the literary pseudonym of Signor Caponi.

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February the 18th last); "the refusal can be attributed therefore to no other circumstance than the provisions of the law. For this reason we do not believe that Verdi made this application."

The worthy and unassuming *maestro* Basily, in addition to his great learning, was of a lofty and noble disposition, and at all times just and considerate ("We appeal to all who have known him," says Signor Biaggi), and I entreat the worthy Folchetto to make such arrangements that the illustrious Verdi may be induced, in a couple of words, to give the true version of this foolish and odious imputation.

Excuse my boldness, and, in the name of justice, be kind enough to keep my request in mind, and to believe me, etc., etc.,

R. PARAVICINI.

The recipient of this letter thought he could not do better than communicate it to Verdi, begging him to decide the question which divided his biographers. The master answered immediately by a second letter, as follows:—

BUSSETO, SANT'-AGATA, *October 13th*, 1880.

DEAR CAPONI,—It was not in 1833, but in 1832, in the month of June (I had not then completed my nineteenth year), that I made application in writing to be admitted a paying pupil at the Conservatoire of Milan. In addition, I went through a sort of examination at the Conservatoire, producing some of my compositions, and playing a piece on the pianoforte before Basily, Piantanida, Angeleri, and others, including the veteran

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Rolla, to whom I had been recommended by my master at Busseto, Ferdinando Provesi. About a week afterwards I called on Rolla, who said to me, "*Think no more about the Conservatoire; choose a master in the town; I recommend you Lavigna or Negri.*"

I knew nothing more about the Conservatoire. No one replied to my application. No one, either before or after the examination, spoke to me about the rule. And I know nothing of the opinion of Basily related by Fétis.

That is all.

I write to you in haste, and briefly, because you are in a hurry. But I have, nevertheless, said all I know.

My wife thanks you, and sends greetings, and I warmly press your hands.

Yours,

G. VERDI.

It results from this letter, that if Verdi did not receive a peremptory refusal from Basily in answer to his application for admission to the Conservatoire, this refusal was none the less real, since his application was followed by no result, in spite of the examination which they had put him through.

However, although thus repulsed from the great school to which he might have been happy to belong, he did not lose courage, and gave his mind to the choice of a master who would guide him in the right way and complete his education. Having acquainted his host

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Seletti, who had conceived a warm affection for him, with the advice which Rolla had given, namely to apply to Lavigna or to Negri, Seletti strongly urged him to seek the former of these two masters. The composer Vincenzo Lavigna, a former pupil of the Conservatoire of Naples, at that time performed the duties of *maestro al cembalo* at the theatre of La Scala.[1] A practised musician and skilful harmonist, he was something over fifty years of age, and had made himself known by a certain number of dramatic works, some of which had obtained real success: *La Muta per Amore*, *L'Idolo di se Stesso*, *L'Impostore avvilito*, *Coriolano*, *Di posta in posta*, *Zaïra*, etc.

Verdi made application therefore to him, showing him the same compositions which he had showed to Basily. After having examined these attempts, Lavigna consented willingly to give his care to the young artist who had solicited it. He had no reason to repent of the

[1] Some years back, a French journal of music, in the first number of publication, touching on the subject of the early days of Verdi, of his arrival in Milan, and of the acquaintance he made in that town of Lavigna, translated the words *maestro al cembalo*, which describe the office held by that distinguished artist, in a curious manner, and made of Lavigna *a professor of the cymbals* at the theatre of *La Scala!* Everybody knows that the Italian word *cembalo*, although it may mean cymbal, is also the ancient name of the pianoforte, and that the *maestro al cembalo* is the artist who performs the functions of director of the music and conductor in lyric theatres.

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determination, for the progress of the latter was rapid, and did honour to the teaching of the master. Barezzi, whose solicitude did not flag for a moment, and who from afar watched over his *protégé*, received direct proofs of the fact. Having travelled to Milan one day to satisfy himself on this subject, and having called on Lavigna to ask what he thought of his pupil, the professor appeared delighted, and replied, "Giuseppe is a fine young fellow, prudent, studious, of great intelligence. The day will come when he will be a great honour to me as well as to his country."

Lavigna had complete confidence in the talent of his pupil. An anecdote will prove this, an anecdote which in a slight degree points to the confusion of Basily, and to the little foresight he had shown with regard to Verdi.

Verdi passed with his master almost all the evenings when the latter was not himself at La Scala, and among the artists who often came to visit Lavigna was Basily himself. One night, when chance had brought together these three only, the two *maestri* conversed about the deplorable result of a competition for the post of *maître de chapelle* and organist of the church of San Giovanni de Monza. Of twenty-eight young artists who had taken part in the competition, not one had known how to develop

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correctly the subject given by Basily for the construction of a fugue. Lavigna, not without a spice of mischief, began to say to his friend :—

" It is really a very remarkable fact. Well! look at Verdi, who has studied fugue for about two years; I lay a wager that he would have done better than your eight-and-twenty candidates."

" Really?" replied Basily, in rather a tone of vexation.

" Certainly. Do you remember your subject? Yes, you do? Well, write it down."

Basily wrote, and Lavigna giving the theme to Verdi, said to him :—

" Sit down there at that table, and just begin to work out this subject."

Whereupon the two friends resumed their conversation, up to the moment when Verdi, approaching, said simply :—

" There, it is done."

Basily took the paper and examined it, giving signs of astonishment as he continued to read. When he came to the conclusion, he could not do otherwise than compliment Verdi on his work. He said to him afterwards, by way of remark :—

" But how is it that you have written a double canon on my subject?"

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"It is because," answered the young man, who no doubt still took to heart the reception which had been given him at the Conservatoire—"It is because I found it rather poor, and I wished to embellish it."

Basily bit his lips, and said nothing. It must be added, that subsequently, in the walks which all three often took in the evening, Lavigna and his pupil being accustomed to go and accompany Basily, who was of a very timid disposition, home to the Conservatoire, no allusion was ever made by Verdi to the repulse he had received at the hands of the latter.

We are approaching the time when the young artist began to make himself known and especially to make himself appreciated by musicians. An adventure of which he was the hero, and which ended in his conducting with great success a performance of the *Creation*, the oratorio of the celebrated Haydn, proves this sufficiently. An account of this little circumstance will be found farther on, a very curious account given by Verdi himself. I shall therefore say nothing about it here. But I must remark that it was just at this time that he began to compose seriously and copiously. From this epoch date several pieces for the pianoforte, marches, overtures, serenades, several cantatas, vocal melodies, and even a

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Stabat Mater and some other religious compositions. Not one of all these has been published, but several of the pieces nevertheless have their history. The greater part of the marches were written for the Philharmonic Society of Busseto, and were devoted for use in the processions of the "Fête-Dieu" and Good Friday, and one of them, containing an important part for the keyed trumpet (an instrument of recent invention, which Orlando Barezzi, brother of Verdi's benefactor, played with great skill), served later as the foundation of the funeral march in *Nabucco;* as to the overtures, they were performed in the theatre of La Scala, at the soirées given for the benefit of the Pio Istituto Teatrale; finally, some fragments of these youthful productions were utilised by the composer in two of his earliest dramatic scores, *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi.*[1]

[1] Verdi was under fifteen when he wrote his first overture for the Philharmonic Society of Busseto, which preserves it still. It was performed at Easter, 1828. Some military marches were also composed by him at the same period for the municipal band of Busseto, of which he also formed part—in the capacity of big drum!

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CHAPTER IV.

Death of Provesi.—Verdi returns to Busseto to take his post.—Strange story.—Musical Guelfs and Ghibelins.—First success of Verdi.—He falls in love with the daughter of his protector Barezzi, and asks her hand, which is granted him.—His marriage.—After a new stay of three years at Busseto, he returns to Milan, with his wife and his two children.

HERE one of the most singular and unknown incidents of Verdi's youth finds its place. Signor Ercole Cavalli, as far as I know, is the only person who has related it, and as he has done so with a profusion of extremely curious details, I propose to translate literally the passage of his interesting work, at the same time bringing it into harmony with some new and hitherto entirely unknown information.

In 1833 Giovanni Provesi died, at the advanced age of seventy years. The council of the Monte di Pietà of Busseto and all those who had contributed to the completion of Verdi's education had done so with the intention that, at the death of Provesi, he should become his successor both as *maître de chapelle* and organist

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of the collegiate foundation, as well as director-in-chief of the Philharmonic Society. Verdi was much affected by the sad news of the death of Provesi; he deplored one who had taught him the first elements of the art, one who had opened for him the path of greatness and glory; and although he thought himself called to a more lofty mission, he wished to hold to the engagements he had formed towards his benefactors, and returned to Busseto to succeed his master. The nomination of *maître de chapelle* and organist was in the hands of the council of the revenues of the foundation, composed for the larger part of priests and church officers. The clergy were by no means favourable to Verdi, whom they called the fashionable *maestrino*, as he had studied secular music and the music of the stage only, and they were seeking a master more skilful in the art of the rough and monotonous plain-song.

In competition with Verdi, there presented himself Giovanni Ferrari, an organist almost below mediocrity, but who possessed the recommendations of two bishops. Thanks to his testimonials, Ferrari was well received by the council, who favoured him with their votes, and the pupil of Provesi and Lavigna, for whom the neighbourhood had made such sacrifices, found himself rejected. On the announcement of this

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result, the Philharmonic Society, which loved and esteemed Verdi, whose remarkable merits they had been the first to find out,—this same Society, which for so many years had been in the habit of accompanying the music of the masses and hymns, lost its temper, went to the church, turned everything topsy-turvy, and carried off all the music belonging to it. This, in a district which previously had given to others an example of concord, was the signal of a civil war which lasted several years.

Neither calumnies nor lies were spared; the neighbourhood was divided into two parties, the Verdians and the Ferrarians, the first of which was commanded by Barezzi and the Philharmonic Society, and supported by all the honest and intelligent population, while the second was composed of the *curé*, the clergy, and all the devout of the town. The clerical party laughed and rejoiced among themselves, and were very glad to revive once again the rivalries of the Middle Ages, and to transform the best of countries into a battle-field of the Guelfs and Ghibelins.

From this discord were engendered outrages, insults, satires, and strife of all kinds, which were the cause of imprisonments, persecutions, and other annoyances; different decrees were passed to forbid the Philharmonic Society from

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holding any kind of meeting, and these decrees were made at the instigation of the clergy.[1]

In the midst of these scenes, which lasted for years, Verdi, conscious of his own powers, aspiring already after the brilliant and prominent career which he was destined to follow, felt that Busseto must not be allowed to become his tomb. Although the most concerned and the most injured in all these proceedings, he kept himself aloof from them with

[1] It was in truth a resumption of hostilities, and not the beginning of a war; for the situation was already very strained during the life of Provesi. The latter, although in the service of the clergy, was by no means friendly towards them; for, by means of satirical writings of all kinds, he never ceased to worry the priests, especially a certain canon, by name Pietro Seletti, who taught Verdi Latin, and who was also a musician, and played the violin. Seletti, to avenge the taunts of Provesi, was always advising Verdi to abandon the study of music. "Of what use will it be to you?" said he; "you have talent for Latin; you will do much better to enter the ecclesiastical order. What will music lead to? You will never even become organist of Busseto—never!"

A few days afterwards a mass was sung in the church of the college, and it was intended that this mass should be accompanied on the organ. But the organist, a certain Sancini, did not arrive. The scholars got impatient; one of them then went to find Seletti, and begged him to persuade Verdi to replace the defaulter. The priest, curious to see how the boy would get through, sent to ask the authorisation of the censor, which he granted. There, then, was Verdi seated before the organ of Busseto, of which Seletti himself had declared him unworthy, giving the rein to his inspiration, and producing a profound sensation! The mass at an end, Seletti called him, and asked what music he had been playing. Verdi replied timidly that he had simply followed his fancy. "Bravo! bravissimo!" exclaimed Seletti; "continue to study music. You are quite right, and henceforth you may be sure that I will not say a word to turn you from it."

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all the prudence possible, applying himself to his studies, and preparing the materials for those works which were one day to lift him from such profound obscurity to such greatness. In spite of all, the Philharmonic Society continued to exist, under the protection of Barezzi, and Verdi continued to be its director in the place of Provesi.

Before these circumstances occurred, at the time when calm and peace had not as yet ceased to reign, the municipal council of Busseto used to grant a contribution of three hundred liri (francs) to the *maître de chapelle* of the collegiate church for the purpose of teaching music gratuitously to those who aspired to take part in the Philharmonic Society. The municipality did justice in assigning this allowance not to Ferrari, but to Verdi, who accepted it with the object of bearing grateful testimony to the neighbourhood which had done so much for him; it was settled at the same time that Verdi should remain for three years *maestro* of the commune, with the above salary of three hundred liri; and this act of disinterestedness redounds to the honour of the great master.

At this period Barezzi, who looked on Verdi as his son, lodged him in his own house. Barezzi was the father of a fine and numerous family. Margarita, the first of the daughters,

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was handsome, taking, and clever. To live together, to love each other, to come to an understanding, was the affair of a moment. Margarita was smitten with this young man, comely, prudent, and studious, whose brilliant future she foresaw; the young man was smitten with Margarita, the charming daughter of his benefactor; everything was destined to favour the success of their projects. Verdi asked of Barezzi the hand of his daughter; that generous man replied that he would never refuse her hand to a worthy young fellow like Verdi, who, if he had no fortune, possessed talent and intelligence which were more valuable than any patrimony; and he was not deceived!

In 1835 the marriage was celebrated, the whole of the Philharmonic Society taking part. It was in truth an occasion of joy and emotion for Verdi, who could see the great step which he had made in the direction of the future which awaited him. Born poor and without fortune, at the age of twenty-three years he had already become a composer, and was marrying the daughter of a family both rich and of good position.

As soon as the engagement which he had contracted with the municipality of Busseto was fulfilled, as soon as the three years during which he was to give his attention to the Philharmonic

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Society had passed away—years which he employed in severe and assiduous study—he could no longer remain at Busseto with an annual salary of three hundred liri. He therefore abandoned his native country to establish himself at Milan with his family, for Margarita had already made him the father of two children.

I am now about to turn back a little, and, with the aid of private sources of information, to complete the story which has just been read.

During the three years which Verdi passed as *maestro di musica del Comune e Monte di Pietà di Busseto*—for that was his official title—the three hundred francs of the municipality, with the contribution of the Monte di Pietà and the subscriptions of a few private persons, ensured him a salary in all points equal to that which Ferrari, the favourite of the clergy, received. There was at that time at Busseto as *podesta* (mayor) a man without instruction, without culture, but honest, upright, a good administrator, and endowed with energy of character, who was the antagonist of the head of the chapter of the church. This honest citizen did not fail for an instant to support Barezzi as president of the Philharmonic Society, nor young Verdi as *maestro* of the commune, and it is owing to him that the con

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flict engaged in was followed up with so much ardour and success. This conflict displayed at times a most singular character.

In his capacity of master of the music to the commune, Verdi composed marches for the *banda* (town band), and nearly every Sunday after vespers, they performed these pieces on the public place of Busseto, to the great delight of the population, which was proud of its *maestro*, and held him in adoration. As master of the music to the Monte di Pietà, he wrote masses, vespers, *saluts*, instructed his singers and his musicians, and means were found to have his compositions also executed, in spite of his rival and of the clergy, who tried to persecute him. In this manner they celebrated "the month of Mary" with his music in a little chapel called *La Madonina Rossa*, a chapel which was completely out of the control of the principal of the college, from the fact that it belonged to the Franciscan monks, over whom the former exercised no ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It was there that they performed on Sundays the *saluts* of the young composer; after this the *banda* played; it happened even occasionally that at the end of the music there was a display of fireworks on the public place. Besides this, the church of the Franciscan monastery, a beautiful specimen of Gothic archi-

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tecture, at the present day belonging to the Pallavicini family, served for the execution of masses and other important works; and when Verdi went to play the organ in this church, and performed his own works, the cathedral of Busseto became deserted, all the faithful going to hear mass and *salut* at the Franciscans', who, in opposition to the clergy of the town, held out energetically for the *protégé* of Barezzi. In this respect the success of Verdi was so great that he was in general requisition, and the little towns and villages in the environs of Busseto, such as Soragna, Monticelli, Castelarquato, Lugagnano, etc., each wished to enjoy it in turn. Sometimes from one direction, sometimes from another, they used to send omnibuses on Sunday to fetch Verdi, his singers, and his musicians, and conveyed them to the favoured district, where they performed mass and vespers, where the band played and the music accompanied the procession. On those occasions crowds gathered from all parts, the concourse was enormous, the excitement general, the success unheard of, and I leave it to be imagined what sort of reception these populations *en fête*, so little accustomed to such ceremonies, delighted with such kindness, and intoxicated with the sunshine, gave to the young *maestro* and all those who accompanied him.

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Still Verdi did not forget that he was also director of the Philharmonic Society. It was he, naturally, who got up and directed the concerts of that Society, concerts which were given in a large hall at Barezzi's (and afterwards, when the young master was married, at his own home in the Palazzo Rusca). The meetings were vocal and instrumental, and Verdi shone, not only as composer and conductor, but also as *virtuoso*. He was at that period an excellent pianist, and usually played two or three brilliant pieces, which he generally selected from the works of Hummel and Kalkbrenner; but one of the pieces which brought him most applause was an arrangement of the overture to *William Tell*, made by himself, which he performed with astonishing *maestria* on the famous pianoforte by Fritz, of Vienna, the use of which Barezzi had allowed him not so long ago, and which had now become almost his own.[1]

I have said a few pages back that it is in great measure to this pianoforte that he was indebted for the acquaintance of the young

[1] This pianoforte, which afterwards accompanied Verdi to Milan, and on which he composed the greater part of his operas, reposes at present at Sant'-Agata, in company with the spinet repaired by Cavaletti. It is now past service, and its master has replaced it, both in the country and in Genoa, by an excellent Erard.

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Margarita Barezzi, whom he met from time to time when he went to practice. This young lady, before he suspected it, made an impression on his mind and on his heart. A good musician, she began by taking singing lessons of Provesi; she then studied the pianoforte, which she played very well. During the holidays which Lavigna gave him yearly, Verdi returned to Busseto, to the house of his old friend and protector; then it was that he saw Margarita again, that the two young people began to make music together, to play pieces for four hands, and that the affection which had sprung up several years previously became every day closer and deeper. Signor Cavalli's account has told how this union of two young hearts ended in their marriage. But a short time afterwards Verdi received at Busseto the news of the death of Lavigna. He felt great affection for this excellent master, who had been kind to him, and to whom he justly thought he owed a debt of gratitude; he was much grieved by the announcement of his death, and mourned for him with heartfelt sorrow.

About this time, having fulfilled all the conditions of his contract with the municipality of Busseto, he considered himself free, and decided to return to Milan, to which place he, in fact, went with his wife and the two children she had already borne him.

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CHAPTER V.

Settlement in Milan.—Verdi *chef d'orchestre* of the Philodramatic Society.—His first opera, *Oberto di San Bonifacio*, brought out with success at La Scala.—He undertakes to write three other works for that theatre.—He is entrusted with the libretto of a comic opera: *Un Giorno di Regno*. Whilst engaged with this work, he falls ill; then, scarcely recovered, he loses, one after the other, his two children and his wife.—His despair.—Performance and failure of *Un Giorno di Regno*.—Verdi wishes to renounce the theatre, in spite of the entreaties of Merelli, director of La Scala.—After many refusals, he decides, on the solicitation of the latter, to write a new opera.—*Nabucco*.—Brilliant success.

BACK again in Milan, Verdi had but one aim, one object in life—the theatre. He was possessed by the demon of the stage; at the present day we can acknowledge that he was not mistaken as to the nature of his aspirations. He formed the acquaintance of a young poet, nineteen years of age, who, at the very threshold of life, had just appeared with great success by bringing out a little volume of verse—*Miei Primi Canti*—the rare worth of which had wrung from the Italians the exclamation, "Abbiamo un poeta!" This youthful writer, who was called Temistocle Solera, had also the dream of appearing at the theatre as librettist. These two young men

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were, at first sight, seized with a lively affection for each other, which was never interrupted. From their collaboration sprang the work which formed the *début* of Verdi, and which the latter had the good fortune to see performed at La Scala, one of the four great lyric theatres of Italy.

Fortune had in other respects treated Verdi with special kindness in associating him from his earliest efforts with an artist like Solera. The latter was, in fact, not only a poet, but already, in spite of his youth, an excellent musician. In proof of this, eight days after the representation of their first work, he brought out, in this same theatre La Scala, a hymn entitled *La Melodia*, of which he had written both words and music, and which was well received. The following year he put on the stage a serious opera, *Ildegonda*, of which he was also both poet and composer, and that, too, was received with no less favour.[1] Later, setting aside poems which he entrusted to different composers, he produced other works

[1] On the subject of this work of Solera, I am able to report a remarkable circumstance. At the moment of the production of *Ildegonda*, when the work was ready to be offered to the public, he had not written the overture, no doubt not feeling in the vein of inspiration. He came one day to call on his friend Verdi, turned his papers over and over with apparent negligence, and at last laid his hand on one of the numerous overtures which the young master had written for the Phil-

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of which he was the sole author: *Il Contadino d'Agliate* (Milan), *La Fanciulla di Castelguelfo* (Modena), *Genio e Sventura* (Padua), *La Sorella di Pelagio* (Madrid), etc. One can imagine all the advantages which a young composer like Verdi would derive from such collaboration.[1]

But here I am going to allow Verdi himself to relate his first appearance. No account could be more interesting nor more exact, for what follows resembles a fragment of autobiography. The reader will be good enough to carry his attention a few years back, that is to say, to the time of the first visit of Verdi to Milan; he may rest assured that he will lose nothing by so doing.[2]

harmonic Society of Busseto. Without saying a word, he took possession of this overture, carried it off immediately to the chief copyist of La Scala to transcribe the parts, and to place it at the beginning of his score. The latter, recognising the handwriting, exclaimed, "But this is Verdi's writing!" "Yes, yes," replied Solera; "it's of no consequence—go on!" And the next day Verdi, astonished, recognised his own overture in that of *Ildegonda*.

[1] After an existence strangely troubled and adventurous, Solera died, poor and forgotten, about 1878. The chances of an unsettled life had taken him into Spain, where he occupied an important position; then into Egypt, where he became chief of the police of the Viceroy; at last to Paris, where he became a dealer in antiquities!

[2] It is Signor Ricordi, the publisher, the admirer and devoted friend of Verdi, who a few years since, in intimate conversation, had the happy chance to collect these interesting particulars from the very mouth of the composer; he at once took them down, as it were, in shorthand, and it has thus been possible to give them to the public.

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". . . About 1833 or 1834 there existed at Milan a Philharmonic Society, composed of good musical elements.[1] It was directed by a *maestro* named Masini, who, although he was not distinguished by much knowledge, had at least patience and firmness of purpose, which are in truth the qualities necessary for a society of amateurs. At that time they were getting up the execution of an oratorio of Haydn, the *Creation;* my master, Lavigna, asked me if, in order to improve myself, I should like to take part in the rehearsals, which offer I accepted with pleasure.

" No one paid the slightest attention to the short young man who was modestly seated in a dark corner. Three *maestri*, Perelli, Bonoldi, and Almasio, conducted the rehearsals; but lo! one fine day, by a remarkable coincidence, all three failed at the same time. Those who were to take part lost patience, and Masini, who did not feel equal to sitting down at the pianoforte and accompanying from the score, turned to me to beg me to serve as accompanist, saying, little confident as he perhaps was in

[1] It was a reunion of rich amateurs, *dilettanti*, which had taken the name of " Società Filodrammatica," at the head of which were several great personages, for instance Count Renato Borromeo, who was its president, the Duke Visconti, Count Pompeo Belgiojoso, etc. Every Friday in winter they gave a grand artistic meeting in the hall of the Teatro Filodrammatico, which was their property.

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the skill of an unknown young artist, 'It will be sufficient if you just put in the bass.'

"I was then just fresh from my studies, and certainly did not find myself embarrassed before an orchestral score. I agreed, and sat myself at the pianoforte to begin the rehearsal. I well remember the ironical smiles of some of the amateurs, and it seems that my youthful physiognomy, my spare figure, and my modest dress, were not of a nature to inspire great confidence.

"However this may have been, we began the rehearsal, and little by little becoming warmed and excited, I did not confine myself to accompanying, but began to conduct with the right hand, playing with the left alone. When the rehearsal was over, I received on all sides compliments and congratulations, especially from Count Pompeo Belgiojoso and Count Renato Borromeo.

"As a sequel to this incident, whether the three *maestri* of whom I have spoken were too busy to continue to take the engagement or whether for other reasons, it ended in my being entrusted with the entire direction of the concert; the public performance took place with such success, that a second was given in the great hall of the Casino dei Nobili, in the presence of the Archduke and the Archduchess

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Raineri and of all the great society of that time.[1]

"A short time afterwards, Count Renato Borromeo charged me with the composition of the music of a cantata for voice and orchestra, on the occasion, if I remember rightly, of the marriage of a member of his family. It is well to remark on this subject, that from all this work I derived no pecuniary advantage, and that my assistance was entirely gratuitous.

"Masini, who, it appears, had great confidence in the young artist, then proposed to me to write an opera for the Philodramatic Theatre, which he directed, and forwarded to me a libretto, which subsequently, modified in part by Solera, became *Oberto di San Bonifacio.*

"I accepted the offer gladly, and returned to Busseto, where I was engaged as organist. There I stayed for about three years. My opera completed, I once more undertook the journey to Milan, carrying my finished score with me, in perfect order, having taken the trouble to extract and copy all the voice parts myself.

" But here began my difficulties : Masini was no longer director of the Philodramatic Theatre ;

[1] So great was the success, that the Viceroy himself expressed a desire to hear the *Creation*, and a third performance was given in his palace, also under the direction of Verdi.

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it was, therefore, no longer possible to give my opera. However, whether he really had confidence in me, or whether he wished in some way to prove his gratitude (after the *Creation*, I had helped him on several other occasions in preparing and in directing the execution of different pieces, among others *La Cenerentola*, and always without recompense of any kind), he was not discouraged in the face of difficulties, and promised me that he would do all he could to get my opera represented at La Scala, on the occasion of the annual *soirée* which was given for the benefit of the Pio Istituto. Count Borromeo and the advocate Pasetti promised Masini their support in these circumstances; but I must say, to keep strictly to the truth, that this support produced no more than a few commonplace words of recommendation. On the contrary, Masini gave himself much trouble, and he was strongly backed up by the violoncellist Merighi, who had faith in me. I had known him in the orchestra of the Philodramatic Theatre, of which he was a member.

"At last they succeeded in making all arrangements for the spring of 1839, and in such a manner that I had the double fortune of bringing out my work at the theatre of La Scala and of having as its interpreters four artists really remarkable: Signora Strepponi, the tenor

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Moriani, the baritone Giorgio Ronconi, and the bass Marini.

"The parts were distributed, and the vocal rehearsals had scarcely begun, when Moriani fell seriously ill! Everything was thus interrupted, and the production of my opera was no longer to be thought of. I was quite disconcerted, and was getting ready to return to Busseto, when one morning I saw arrive at my door one of the staff of the theatre of La Scala, who said to me in a gruff tone of voice:—

"'Are you the *maestro* from Parma who was going to give an opera for the Pio Istituto? Come to the theatre; the *impresario* is waiting for you.'

"'Really?' I cried.

"'Yes, signor. I was ordered to go and find out the *maestro* from Parma who was going to give an opera. If it is you, come.'

"And I went.

"The *impresario* of La Scala at that time was Bartolomeo Merelli. One night, behind the scenes, he had overheard a conversation between Signora Strepponi and Giorgio Ronconi, a conversation in the course of which Strepponi spoke very favourably of the music of *Oberto di San Bonifacio*, which Ronconi also found to his taste.

"I presented myself then to Merelli, who

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without any preliminaries, said that in consideration of the favourable opinion which he had heard expressed of my opera, he was of his own accord disposed to put it on the stage during the next season; but that if I closed with the offer, I should have to make some alterations in my score, the artists who would play in it not being the same as those who were to have sung it originally. It was a brilliant offer for me; young, unknown, I came across an *impresario* who dared to put on the stage a new work without asking of me an indemnity of any sort, an indemnity, moreover, which it would have been quite impossible for me to raise. Merelli, taking on his own shoulders all the necessary expenses, proposed to divide with me in equal parts the sum which I should get if, in case of success, I sold my score. Let no one suppose that this was a burdensome proposition; it was the work of a beginner that was in question; and, in fact, the result turned out successful enough to induce the publisher Giovanni Ricordi to consent to acquire the ownership of my opera at the price of two thousand Austrian liri.[1]

[1] Accurately, seventeen hundred and fifty francs (seventy pounds sterling). The publisher Giovanni Ricordi was the celebrated founder of the house of that name; he was the father of Signor Tito Ricordi, his successor, and grandfather of Signor Giulio Ricordi, who drew up this statement.

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"*Oberto di San Bonifacio* obtained a success, if not very considerable, at least sufficiently great to warrant a certain number of representations, which Merelli thought he might increase by giving a few in excess of the subscription.[1]

"The work was sung by Madame Marini, mezzo soprano,[2] Salvi, tenor, and by the bass Marini, and, as I have said, I was compelled to make some modifications in my music to adapt it to the voices of my new singers. I also wrote a new piece, the quartet the dramatic situation of which was suggested by Merelli himself, and the words I got Solera to write. This quartet was one of the best portions of the opera.

"Merelli then made me what was at that time a splendid proposition; that is to say, he tendered me a contract by which I was to undertake the composition, at intervals of eight months, of three operas, to be produced at La Scala or at the Imperial Theatre of Vienna, of which he was also director; on his part, he engaged to give me four thousand Austrian liri for each of these operas, the price of the sale of the scores to be divided between us in equal

[1] *Oberto di San Bonifacio* was brought out for the first time on November 17th, 1839.

[2] Madame Raineri-Marini, who enjoyed a great reputation. To the performers cited by Verdi must be added Mrs. Alfred Shaw.

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shares. I immediately accepted these propositions, and shortly after, Merelli, who was starting for Vienna, engaged the poet Rossi to furnish me with a libretto, which was that of *Il Proscritto*. This libretto did not satisfy me completely, and I had not as yet begun to put it to music when Merelli, returning from Milan in the early months of 1840, told me that, on account of the special exigencies of his *repertoire*, he was in positive want of an *opera buffa* for the autumn. He added that he was at once going to find me a libretto, and that I could put *Il Proscritto* in hand later. I could not refuse, and Merelli gave me several libretti of Romani to peruse, which, whether because they had not met with success, or for some other reason, had been overlooked. In vain I read and re-read them; not one of them pleased me; however, as matters pressed, I ended by choosing the one which appeared to me the least bad. The title of it was *Il Finto Stanislao*, for which was substituted that of *Un Giorno di Regno*.[1]

"I lived at that time in a small and modest apartment in the neighbourhood of the Porta

[1] *Il Finto Stanislao* had been previously set to music by Gyrowetz. This is the only comic work which Verdi ever wrote, and its lamentable failure has often been spoken of. It is certain that the comic vein is opposed to the composer's melancholic nature, and to his ardent temperament, full of impetuosity and dramatic power. I must remark, however, that, on the advice of his master, he made more than one

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Ticinese, and I had my little family with me, that is to say my young wife and our two little children. I had hardly begun my work than I fell seriously ill of a throat complaint, which compelled me to keep my bed for a long time. I was beginning to be convalescent, when I remembered that the rent, for which I wanted fifty écus, would become due in a few days. At that time, if such a sum was of importance to me, it was no very serious matter; but my painful illness had not allowed me to provide it in time, and the state of the communications with Busseto (in those days the post only went twice a week) did not leave me the opportunity of writing to my excellent father-in-law Barezzi to enable him to send the necessary funds. I wished, whatever trouble it might give me, to pay my lodging on the day fixed, and although very annoyed at being obliged to have recourse to a third person, I nevertheless decided to beg the engineer Pasetti to ask Merelli on my behalf for the fifty écus which I wanted, either in the form of an advance under the conditions of my contract, or by way of loan for eight or

attempt of this character, and that in the course of his studies with Lavigna he wrote, to get his hand in, a certain number of *buffo* pieces, and pieces *di mezzo carattiere*. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this first trial of his comic powers was made under sad conditions, so sad that he was never disposed to repeat the attempt.

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ten days, that is to say the time necessary for writing to Busseto and receiving the said sum.

"It is useless to relate here how it came about that Merelli, without any fault on his part, did not advance me the fifty écus in question. Nevertheless I was much distressed at letting the rent day of the lodgings go by. My wife then, seeing my annoyance, took a few articles of jewellery which she possessed, and succeeded, I know not how, in getting together the sum necessary, and brought it to me. I was deeply touched at this proof of affection, and promised myself to return them all to her, which, happily, I was able to do with little difficulty, thanks to my agreement.[1]

"But now began for me the greatest misfortunes. My *bambino* fell ill at the beginning of April, the doctors were unable to discover the

[1] There is no necessity to dwell on this charming trait, and on the touching simplicity with which it is related. Nevertheless the anecdote has a sequel, which is not without interest. Two years later, that is to say the very day after the triumph of *Nabucco*, Merelli, delighted, pressed Verdi in his arms, embraced him, and could not find warm enough expressions of congratulation. "Yes, yes," answered the composer, with a smile, "you embrace me to-day, but only a year ago I asked you for fifty écus, and you refused me!" At these words Merelli turned pale, and having had the incident explained to him, took Verdi by the arm and led him at once to Pasetti's, to get a declaration from the latter that he had never heard one word of the matter. The truth is that Pasetti, a timorous spirit, a weak man, who was afraid even of his own shadow, had not dared to ask Merelli for the fifty écus which Verdi wanted, and that he had got out of the difficulty with the latter by means of a falsehood.

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cause of his ailment, and the poor little thing, fading away, expired in the arms of his mother, who was beside herself with despair. That was not all. A few days after my little daughter fell ill in turn, and her complaint also terminated fatally. But this even was not all. Early in June my young companion herself was attacked by acute brain fever, and on the 19th June, 1840, a third coffin was carried from my house.

"I was alone!—alone! In the space of about two months three loved ones had disappeared for ever. I had no longer a family! And, in the midst of this terrible anguish, to avoid breaking the engagement I had contracted, I was compelled to write and finish a comic opera!

"*Un Giorno di Regno* did not succeed.[1] A share of the want of success certainly belongs to the music, but part must also be attributed to the performance. My soul rent by the misfortunes which had overwhelmed me, my spirit soured by the failure of my opera, I persuaded myself that I should no longer find consolation in art, and formed the resolution to compose

[1] The work was performed at La Scala the 5th of September, 1840. It had for interpreters Salvi, Ferlotti, Rovere, Scalese, Signora Marini, and Signora Abbadia. Subsequently *Un Giorno di Regno* was performed at the San Benedetto Theatre at Venice, and at the Fondo at Naples, under the original title of the libretto, *Il Finto Stanislao;* but it was not more fortunate than at its first appearance in Milan.

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no more! I even wrote to the engineer Pasetti (who since the *fiasco* of *Un Giorno di Regno* had shown no signs of life) to beg him to obtain from Merelli the cancelling of my contract.

"Merelli sent for me, and treated me as a capricious child. He would not allow me to become disgusted with art on account of one failure, etc., etc. But I held to my point so firmly that Merelli finished by returning to me my agreement, saying :—

"'Listen, Verdi, I cannot make you write by force. My confidence in you is not lessened. Who knows but that one day you may decide to take up your pen again? In that case, it will be enough for you to give me notice two months before the beginning of a season, and I promise that the opera which you bring me shall be put on the stage.'

"I thanked him; but these words did not have the effect of making me reconsider my determination, and I went away.

"I fixed my residence at Milan, near to the Corsia de' Servi. I was out of spirits, and thought no more of music, when one winter evening, coming out of the Cristoforis gallery,[1] I found myself face to face with Merelli, who was going to the theatre. It was snowing great

[1] One of the great glazed arcades of Milan.

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flakes, and Merelli, drawing my arm in his, induced me to accompany him as far as his office at La Scala. We chatted on the way, and he told me that he was in difficulties for a new opera which he had to bring out. He had engaged Nicolai[1] to write this opera, but he was not satisfied with the libretto.

"'Fancy,' said Merelli, 'a libretto by Solera, superb ! ! . . . magnificent ! ! . . . extraordinary ! ! . . . splendid dramatic situations, full of interest, fine poetry ! . . . but this obstinate Nicolai will not hear of it, and declares that it is an impossible libretto ! . . . I would give my head to find another immediately.'

"'. . . I will get you out of the difficulty,' said I at once. 'Did you not have *Il Proscritto* written for me? I have not composed a note of it; I put it at your disposal.'

"'. . . Oh ! bravo ! This is a piece of luck.'

"Thus conversing, we had arrived at the theatre. Merelli called Bassi, who was at the same time poet, stage manager, librarian, *régisseur*, etc., etc., and told him to look at once among the archives to try and find a manuscript of *Il Proscritto*. As a matter of fact, he did find it. But at the same moment, Merelli took

[1] Otto Nicolai, born 1809, died 1849, best known as the composer of *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*), the overture of which is very popular in this country.—J. E. M.

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another manuscript, and showing it to me, cried out :—

"'. . . Stop; here is a libretto of Solera's. So fine a subject, and to refuse it! Take it; read it!"

"'. . . What the deuce do you want me to do with it? I have no wish to read libretti.'

"'. . . Well, I suppose it will not hurt you! Read it, and then bring it me back.'

"And he put it into my hands. It was a large paper book, written in big letters, as was the custom then. I rolled it up, and taking leave of Merelli, made my way to my lodging.

"As I walked, I felt myself seized with a kind of undefinable uneasiness; a profound sadness, a genuine anguish, took possession of my heart. I went into my room, and with an impatient gesture I threw the manuscript on the table, and remained standing before it. In falling on the table, it had opened by itself; without knowing how, my eyes fixed on the page which was before me, and on this verse :—

"'Va, pensiero, sull' ali dorate,'[1]

I ran through the following verses, and was much impressed by them, the more so that they formed almost a paraphrase of the

[1] "Go, my thought, on gilded wings."

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Bible, the reading of which was always dear to me.

"I read first one fragment, then another, but, firm in my resolution to compose no more, I tried to command myself. I shut the book, and went to bed. But bah! *Nabucco* ran in my head; I could not sleep. I got up and read the libretto, not once, but twice, three times, so that in the morning I was able to say that I knew Solera's poem by heart, from one end to the other.

"In spite of all this, I felt no disposition to change my determination, and during the day I went back to the theatre to return the manuscript to Merelli.

"'Oh!' said he, 'it is fine.'

"'Very fine.'

"'Well, set it to music.'

"'Not at all! I will have nothing to do with it.'

"'Set it to music, I say; set it to music.'

"And with these words he took the libretto, rammed it into the pocket of my overcoat, took me by the shoulders, and not only pushed me roughly out of his office, but shut the door in my face and locked himself in.

"What was I to do?

"I returned home with *Nabucco* in my pocket. One day one verse, one day another, one time

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a note, another time a phrase, and little by little the opera was written.[1]

"It was the autumn of 1841, and recalling Merelli's promise, I called on him to announce that *Nabucco* was finished, and that consequently it might be represented in the next season of Carnival and Lent.

"Merelli declared that he was ready to hold to his promise; but at the same time he pointed out to me that it would be impossible for him to give my work in the next season, because the pieces were already arranged, and that he had made choice of three new operas by composers of celebrity. To give a fourth by an author who was making almost his first appearance was dangerous for every one concerned, and especially for me. It would therefore be most convenient, as he thought, to wait till the spring, a time when he was under no obligations, and he assured me that he would engage good artists. But I declined—either during the Carnival, or not at all. For that I had good reasons, for it was not possible to find two artists more suited for my work than Signora Strepponi and Ronconi, who I knew were

[1] While Verdi began to work at his score, Nicolai completed his. But the composer of *Il Templario* was not happy in his new work, and with *Il Proscritto* made one of the completest *fiaschi* which the annals of La Scala have ever had to record.

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engaged, and on whom I founded great hopes.

"Merelli, with every wish to please me, was not in the wrong from a director's point of view. Four new operas in a single season was a tremendous risk to run. But, on the other hand, I had on my side good artistic arguments, which favoured my view of the question. In short, in the midst of yes and no, of arguments, of perplexity, of half-promises, the *cartellone* of La Scala was published, and *Nabucco* was not announced in it.[1]

"I was young; my blood was warm. I wrote to Merelli a foolish letter, in which I let off all my anger; and I confess that no sooner was the letter sent than I felt a certain remorse, fearing that in consequence I had destroyed all my hopes.

"Merelli sent for me, and when he saw me, said, roughly:—

"'Is it thus one should write to a friend? . . . But no matter! you are right, and we will give *Nabucco*. But you must bear this in mind: I have very heavy expenses to meet for the other new operas; consequently, I

[1] The *cartellone* is the placard in which the director of a theatre publishes the description of his company and the detailed programme of the season which is about to open. The publication of the *cartellone* is always an important affair in Italy, especially in the case of a large theatre.

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shall neither be able to make scenery nor costumes for *Nabucco*, so that you will have to be satisfied with the best arrangement that can be made with what can be found in stock.

"I agreed to all, so anxious was I that my opera should be given; and I saw a new *cartellone* appear, on which I was able at last to read NABUCCO!

"Here I call to mind an amusing scene which I had had a short time previously with Solera. In the third act he had made a little love duet between Fenena and Ismaele; this duet did not please me; it interrupted the action, and seemed to me to diminish the Biblical grandeur which characterised the subject. One morning when Solera was with me, I mentioned this to him; but he would not allow it, because he would have had to revise a work already out of hand. We each discussed our reasons; I held to mine, and he to his. At last he asked me what I wanted in the place of the duet, and I suggested to him the idea of the prophecy of Zacharias.[1] This idea struck him as not bad; for all that he was full of '*ifs*' and '*buts*,' up to the moment when he told me that he would think it over, and that he would write the scene shortly. This did not suit me at all; knowing him well,

[1] Verdi was evidently in the right, for it was one of the episodes of the work which produced the deepest impression.

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I was certain that days and days would slip away before Solera brought himself to the point of writing a single line. So I shut the door, put the key in my pocket, and half serious and half in joke, I said to Solera: 'You don't leave this room till you have written the prophecy. Here is a Bible; you will find the words there; all you have to do is to put them into verse.' Solera, who was of rather a hasty nature, did not take it in very good part. A spark of anger glittered in his eyes; I went through an unpleasant moment, for he was a sort of Colossus, who would soon have had the best of my weak frame. But all of a sudden he sat down quietly; and a quarter of an hour after, the prophecy was written.

"In short, towards the end of February, 1842, the rehearsals of *Nabucco* began, and twelve days after the first rehearsal at the pianoforte, the first performance, which was given on the 9th March, took place. I had for interpreters Mesdames Strepponi and Bellinzaghi, with Ronconi, Miraglia, and Derivis.

"With this work my artistic career really began; and if I had to struggle against numerous difficulties, it is none the less certain that *Nabucco* was born under a happy star, for everything which might have injured it turned to its advantage. In fact, I wrote Merelli a

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furious letter, as a consequence of which it seemed quite likely that the *impresario* would send the young *maestro* to the devil, and the contrary happened; the threadbare costumes, rearranged skilfully, became splendid; the old scenery, retouched by the painter Perrani, produced an extraordinary effect, and especially the first scene, which represented the Temple, aroused so much enthusiasm, that the public clapped their hands for at least ten minutes; at the full rehearsal it had not been decided when, nor how, the military band was to enter; the chief, Tutsch, was much troubled; I gave him the cue, and at the first performance the band came on the stage with such precision on the *crescendo*, that the public broke out in applause.

* * * * * *

"It does not do, however, always to trust to lucky stars. Experience has shown me the truth of our proverb, 'Fidarsi è bene, ma non fidarsi è meglio'"—"To trust is good; to mistrust is better."[1]

This statement gives us the completest information with regard to the beginning of the active career of Verdi, and it will be acknowledged that it is remarkable for an accent of truth, good-nature, and modesty, rarely enough met

[1] It was on the 19th October, 1879, that this statement of Verdi was noted down by Signor Giulio Ricordi.

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with in an artist of that position, for so long a time spoilt by success.

But the master, in this statement, is far from having exhausted the details touching *Nabucco*, the first work which brought his name before the notice of the musical world. It remains for me to complete these particulars.

It is known that the choral part is of considerable importance in the score of *Nabucco*. Now at that time not only was the chorus of La Scala weak and few in number, but at the end of the season, already worn out by exceptional work, they were tired beyond measure, and produced effects but moderately satisfactory.

Verdi mentioned it to Merelli, telling him that to ensure a good performance of this part, it would be indispensable slightly to increase the number of his chorus singers. The latter refused to do so point-blank, alleging the amount of his daily expenses, already very heavy, and that he would not add to them. At this point a *dilettante* well known by all the Italian artists, a friend of Merelli, who was on good terms with Verdi, and to some extent concerned in the affairs of La Scala, wished to have a hand in the matter, and offered to pay the extra chorus singers from his own purse. But Verdi, whose pride is known, interrupted him rather sharply, saying to Merelli :—

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"By no means. We will increase the chorus, because it is indispensable, and the extra chorus singers will be at my charge."

The success of the new work began with the very rehearsals. During the whole time that it was in preparation, the theatre was, so to speak, revolutionised by a kind of music of which at that time they had no notion. The character of the score was so new, so unexpected, the movement of it was so rapid, so unusual, that the astonishment was general, and principals, chorus, and orchestra, on hearing this music, displayed an enthusiasm very exceptional. Indeed, it even became impossible to carry on the work of the theatre in front of the stage at the time of the rehearsals; for then the *employés*, workmen, painters, lampmen, stage-carpenters, electrified by what they heard, all left their work to come and listen, with open mouth, to what was passing on the stage. And as soon as a piece was finished, they were heard exchanging impressions, and above all crying out in Milanese dialect—"Che fota nova!"—"What a novelty!"

But all this was as nothing by the side of the triumph of the first performance. A curious custom still in vogue at that time required the composer to place himself in the orchestra between *il contrabasso al cembalo* and *il violon-*

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cello al cembalo, with the object apparently of turning over the pages of these two modest fellow-workers, but really to be as close as possible on the spot either at his success or his failure. Verdi was compelled to conform to this custom, but his success was beforehand considered so certain, that when he took his seat near the first violoncello, Merighi (who was the master of Piatti), the latter said :—

"*Maestro*, I wish I were in your place to-night!"

In fact, the whole evening was one long triumph for the composer. The astonishment was general, the public appeared astounded, and at every moment applause and shouts burst forth with perfect fury. The finale of the first act especially was the object of an unheard-of manifestation of enthusiasm, such as had never been seen. When after the performance Verdi went back with a friend to the room he occupied on the fourth floor in the Strada degli Andeghari, and this friend asked him : "Are you satisfied?" "I hoped," replied he—"I hoped for a success, after the effect produced at the rehearsals, but such a success, certainly not. I assure you that at the *stretto* of the first finale, when all the spectators of the stalls and pit rose *en masse*, shouting and vociferating, I thought at first that

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they were making game of the poor composer, and that they would fall on me and give me a bad time of it."

For several years, in fact, no such a triumph had been witnessed. This triumph was shared by the interpreters of the young composer, who, as we have seen, were no other than the tenor Miraglia; Ronconi, then in all the splendour of his magnificent talent; our excellent Derivis, who quite lately had embraced an Italian career; and, finally, Strepponi, who, it is said, was admirable in the part of Abigail.

Daughter of a composer not without merit,[1] Giuseppina Strepponi had made excellent studies at the Conservatoire of Milan. After making her first appearance with success, about 1835, at the Communal Theatre of Trieste, she was engaged by the Italian Opera of Vienna, then was heard successively at Venice, Brescia, Mantua, Bologna, Leghorn, Rome, Florence, and Bergamo.

To a voice of great compass and magnificence, which she managed with rare talent, she joined fine dramatic feeling and all the qualities of a true lyric *tragedienne*. Her celebrity, therefore,

[1] Felice Strepponi was *maître de chapelle* at Monza, and died at Venice about 1832. Several of his operas, now forgotten, were performed: *Gli Illinesi*, *Francesca da Rimini*, *Amore e Mistero*, *L'Ullà di Bassora*. The latter was favourably received by his contemporaries.

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was already great, and she enjoyed the full favour of the Italian public. She had only just been engaged at La Scala, where she made her *début* the 22nd February, a few days before the appearance of *Nabucco*, in the *Belisario* of Donizetti. Received on the first night with the liveliest sympathy, she contributed afterwards powerfully by her presence to the success of the work of Verdi, in which she displayed at her ease all her vocal qualities, and her rare dramatic powers ensured him a brilliant triumph. Strepponi appeared subsequently at several other theatres, and played several other works of the master. Her career, however, was comparatively short, and she abandoned the stage in the fulness of her powers, having known nothing but success.

It is not without purpose that we give an account of this remarkable artist in speaking of the composer with whose triumphs she was more than once associated. She held later a still more important place in his life. At the end of some years Signora Giuseppina Strepponi became Madame Verdi, and since then she has shared all the joys and all the griefs of the illustrious man whose name she bears.[1]

[1] The religious marriage of Verdi with Mademoiselle Strepponi was celebrated at Collange by M. Mermillod, whose eventful episcopal career is well known. Collange is a little village of Savoy, near Switzerland, close to Geneva. Savoy

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I return to *Nabucco*, on the subject of which I have still to recall several interesting and curious details.

The enormous success of this work had already placed Verdi in the rank of the best-known *maestri*, such as Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini, Luigi Ricci, who might be called upon to write the *opera d'obbligo* for the grand season of the Carnival.[1] Therefore, the night of the third performance, Merelli having called him into his office, gave him to understand in the following terms the decision which the management of La Scala had just come to with regard to him :—

"My dear Verdi, it has just been decided that you are to be engaged to compose the *opera d'obbligo* for the next season. Here is a blank engagement. After a success such as you have just obtained, I cannot propose terms ; it is for you to make your own. Fill up the engagement ; what you insert shall be carried out."

Verdi was much embarrassed, not knowing

at that time still belonged to Piedmont, and the religious ceremony was there sufficient.

[1] It is well known that the *opera d'obbligo* is the opera, whether already played elsewhere, but new for that town, or expressly composed for it, which each *impresario* undertakes, by the engagement signed by him with the municipality of the theatre of which he becomes lessee, to put on the stage in the course of the season.

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what to do. Going into Strepponi's dressing-room, and telling her what Merelli had said, he asked her advice.

The latter replied that, on the one hand, he ought to profit by the chance which had fallen in his way; but that, on the other, he could not reasonably ask more for his next opera than Bellini had obtained for *Norma*. Now *Norma* had brought Bellini eight thousand Austrian liri—six thousand eight hundred francs.[1] Verdi therefore asked the same sum of Merelli, which he agreed to give him for his next work.

It had been arranged between Verdi and Merelli that the produce of the sale of the score of *Nabucco* should be shared between them on equal terms. The celebrated editor Ricordi having become proprietor of the work for the sum of three thousand Austrian liri, Merelli actually received the half; but he refused to profit to the full by this piece of good fortune, for he made the composer a present of one thousand liri.

A last fact.

Donizetti, who, two months and a half before the production of *Nabucco*, had given, at La Scala (26th December, 1841) his *Maria Padilla*,

[1] Fr. 6,800, equal £272 sterling. Some people assure us that it was nine thousand Austrian liri which Verdi asked and obtained for his new opera.

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the last work but one written by him for Italy, stayed for the appearance of Verdi's opera before starting for Bologna, where he was going to direct a performance of Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. The very next day he set off with his four singers—Clara Novello, Alboni, the famous Count Belgiojoso (an amateur who sang like an artist), and a tenor whose name I have forgotten. During the whole course of the journey, preoccupied with the work which he had heard, and still under the influence of the emotion which it had caused him, he remained dreamy and silent, not saying a word to any of his companions, who only heard him remark from time to time :—

"It's fine! It's very fine!"

Did Donizetti suppose that the young composer, in whose triumph he had just taken part, would replace him one day in the affection of the Italian public, and would be, as it were, his successor?[1]

[1] In 1857 two different companies gave Italian opera simultaneously in London, one, of which the director was Mr. Lumley at Her Majesty's Theatre, the other having Mr. Gye at its head at the Lyceum. (Covent Garden Theatre had just been destroyed by fire.) Both of them at the same time played *Nabucco*, but both, strange to say, found themselves compelled to change the title and the subject. In the *Gazette Musicale* of the 14th June, 1857, we read :—"Her Majesty's Theatre has just brought out Verdi's *Nabucco*. This work, which religious scruples forbid to be played under its true title, is called at Mr. Lumley's theatre *Nino*, and at Mr. Gye's

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Anato. Corsi made his *début* in the part of the King of Assyria. The part of Abigail was very favourable to Mademoiselle Spezia, who showed herself a great *tragedienne*, and has risen greatly in general estimation. The other parts were filled with talent by Mademoiselle Ramos, Vialetti, and" (Charles ?) "Braham."

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CHAPTER VI.

I Lombardi, Verdi's fourth work, performed at La Scala. Preliminary difficulties with the censure.—New triumph.—Verdi finds himself placed at the head of Italian musical activity.—*Ernani* at Venice.—Its success.—*Political* character of Verdi's music.—It excites the patriotism of the downtrodden Italians.—*I Due Foscari* at Rome.—*Giovanna d'Arco* at Milan.—An admirable artist, Erminia Frezzolini.—*Alzira* at Naples; *Attila* at Venice; *Macbeth* at Florence.—This last work is more successful than the preceding. They all excite the national feeling, inflame the heart, and raise the enthusiasm, of the people.

ELEVEN months after *Nabucco*, Verdi re-appeared at La Scala, in virtue of the engagement entered into between himself and Merelli, with his new score, *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata.*

His friend Solera had compiled the libretto of this work from the fine poem of Grossi bearing the same title, and in spite of its defects, one may say its extravagances, the poem, in addition to being very pathetic, contained scenes fine enough to excite the imagination of the composer. *I Lombardi* made its appearance on the 11th February, 1843, played by Signora Frezzolini, the tenor Guasco, the

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French bass Derivis; and obtained a success equal to that of *Nabucco*.

Over and above the inherent value of the music, this success had, so to speak, accessory causes, as will be seen from the following details. The fact is that with *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi*, that is to say almost from his first appearance as a composer, Verdi began, as if by instinct, to exercise through his music a political influence on his country. We foreigners are unable to estimate the influence which for some time was stirred up by the ardent and exciting melodies which came to Verdi's hand when the situations, or even a few isolated verses, recalled to him the unfortunate condition of Italy, her memories, and her hopes. As far as regards *I Lombardi*, it was in relation to this work that the Austrian censure, and afterwards that of the little Italian tyrants, began to devote itself to petty researches, which it never abandoned, in order to purify the libretti which Verdi selected, and to reduce them *ad usum Delphini*, and to remove every pretext for demonstrations, of which the public, however, never allowed an opportunity to pass. This is what happened on the subject of *I Lombardi*. The Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Gaisruk—to whom, however, later, the Milanese gave proofs of sympathy,

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because he was better than his masters—made inquiries about the new opera which was being mounted at La Scala. With that object he wrote a furious letter to the director of the police, Torresani, in which he said that to his knowledge there were in *I Lombardi* processions, churches, the valley of Jehoshaphat, a conversion, a baptism, all of them things which he maintained could not be put upon the stage without sacrilege. It wound up by charging the director of the police to forbid the representation of *I Lombardi*, threatening him if he refused to write direct to the Emperor of Austria to bring to his knowledge the licence and want of respect for religion which prevailed in the imperial and royal theatres.

The following day, the director of La Scala, Merelli, and the two authors received a communication from the police, informing them that the opera *I Lombardi* could not be performed without important modifications, and summoning them to the censure to arrange and decide upon these modifications. Verdi repelled this summons with haughtiness. "You go," said he to Merelli and Solera. "As far as I am concerned, the rehearsals are advanced, the opera 'goes' well, and I will not change either a note or a word in it. It shall be played as it is, or it shall not be played at all."

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Merelli and Solera went, therefore, to the police, and Torresani, to excuse himself for the ukase he had sent, showed them the Archbishop's letter. Merelli pointed out to him that all the dresses were ready, that the scenery was painted, that the rehearsals were approaching completion, that all concerned — artists, chorus, orchestra—were enthusiastic over the music of *I Lombardi*, and that Verdi declining to submit to cuts of any sort, he, Torresani, made himself responsible for the suppression of a masterpiece. Solera, on his part, defended his libretto with ardour. At last Torresani rose and said :—

"I am never a person to cut the wings of a young artist who promises so much for the future. Go on! I take all the responsibility.'

He simply desired that for "Ave Maria" the words "Salve Maria" should be substituted, which was a tolerably puerile concession to the scruples of the Archbishop. Under cover of this insignificant alteration, *I Lombardi* could appear.

The first performance approached. The dress rehearsal—for what reason we know not —had been a trifle cold, and Verdi seemed, not discouraged, but a little affected by it. A moment before the beginning of the perform-

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ance, he went to greet Frezzolini in her dressing-room.

"How do you feel?" said he.

"Quite well," answered the great artist.

"Well, then, courage!"

"You have no doubt of it?" answered she. "I will die on the stage to-night if necessary, or your opera shall have an immense success."

Frezzolini did not die, and *I Lombardi* went, as they say in Italy, *alle stelle.*

From three o'clock in the afternoon the populace had taken possession of the entrances of La Scala, and soon made their way into the theatre, every one bringing with him something to eat, so that at the rise of the curtain a strong smell of sausage and garlic diffused itself in all parts of the theatre. That, however, was no obstacle to the success, which soon declared itself. The public wished to have the quintet repeated, but the police would not allow it, while it suffered the polonaise *Non fu sogno* to be recommenced. The censure had its whims. The famous chorus *O signore dal tetto natio* gave rise to one of the first political demonstrations which signalised the awaking of Lombardo-Venetia. I say one of the first, for, in point of fact, the first was in truth that caused by another chorus, *O mia patria, si bella e perduta!* chanted by Hebrew slaves,

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which is a paraphrase of the psalm *By the waters of Babylon*, to which the musician had set a mournful and pathetic melody.

The new opera passed quickly from the *repertoire* of La Scala to that of all the other stages of Italy, and spread at once over the entire world. Its history winds up in a way which is somewhat singular, for after having been translated, or more correctly adapted to the French stage, with considerable alterations, under the title of *Jérusalem*, this second version was subsequently retranslated into Italian, and *Gerusalemme* was thus offered under this new form to the first hearers of *I Lombardi*.

It was on the 26th November, 1847, that *Jérusalem* appeared at the Opera in Paris. The French libretto had been written by Gustave Vaëz and Alphonse Royer; the musician had retouched the score, to which he added several numbers, and the principal part in the work thus transformed was destined to be the last creation of an incomparable artist, M. Duprez, who was on the point of retiring from the stage. The two other important parts were taken by M. Brémond and by a charming singer, Madame Julian van Gelder. In spite of the scenic splendours displayed on this occasion by our first lyric house, in spite of an interpretation of uniform excellence, in spite of the presence

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of M. Duprez, who was truly admirable, and powerfully dramatic in the third act, in the scene of his degradation, the work obtained with us only what is called a *succès d'estime.*[1]

As to the transplantation of *Jérusalem* into Italy, it was no more fortunate than that of *I Lombardi* into France, and in this there is nothing surprising. Signor Basevi, in the excellent and very interesting book of criticism on Verdi which he has published (*Studio sulle Opere di Giuseppe Verdi*), gives very natural reasons for the fact:—"*Jérusalem* was translated into Italian; but this recast at third hand scarcely made an appearance in some of the Italian theatres than it disappeared immediately. It was indeed a ridiculous undertaking to attempt to present anew on the stage of Italy a work which, in another form, had produced so profound an impression on the minds of Italians as *I Lombardi.* There exist certain impressions which are effaced with the greatest

[1] Possibly the very grave political events which were preparing at that time, and which were soon to break out, were partly accountable for the comparatively cold reception which *Jérusalem* received from the Parisian public. It is right to add that in our provincial theatres, where the work was placed on the *répertoire* without delay, it was in most cases received in a more favourable manner. I recall the fact also that Louis Philippe, whose throne began to totter, wished to become acquainted with *Jérusalem*, and had two acts of it performed at the Tuileries. It was on this occasion that Verdi was named Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

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difficulty, even when they have to contend against the force of great beauty; still more hopeless, then, is it to replace them by new when the latter are excited by lesser force, as was the case with regard to the drama and the music of *Gerusalemme.*"[1]

The three successes of *Oberto, Conte di San-Bonifacio*, of *Nabucco*, and of *I Lombardi* had created an exceptional position for Verdi in Italy, and had placed him at the head of the musical progress of his country. A single artist could dispute it with him; this was Donizetti. But the composer of *Lucia* and of *Don Pasquale* was already worn out by excessive production, and had but a few more days to live. The genius of Verdi shone like a new dawn, eclipsing by its increasing brilliancy the still loved presences of certain musicians who had the ear of the public, such as Mercadante, Pacini, and Luigi Ricci. Thus each of the grand theatres wished to have a work by him. He at once decided in favour of the Fenice at Venice, and wrote for it one of his happiest scores, *Ernani*, which obtained an immense success there on the 9th March, 1844.

The subject of *Ernani* had been chosen by Verdi, but without knowing as yet to what

[1] I am ignorant of the time when *Gerusalemme* was performed in Italy.

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writer he should entrust the task of transforming the superb drama of Victor Hugo into an opera. An unusual case — he lacked a librettist! At this moment a young poet, named Francesco Maria Piave, known only up to that time by some agreeable verses, was introduced to the composer, who consented to make him his *collaborateur*, and to entrust him with arranging the libretto of *Ernani*, a libretto which he might certainly have improved, although it is not wanting in good points.[1]

Happily, the musician rose to the grandeur of

[1] Poor Piave, who died mad some years back, was one of the most assiduous fellow-workmen of Verdi, to whom he supplied in succession, on his indication (for Verdi always chose himself the subjects which he wished to set to music), the libretti of *I Due Foscari*, *Macbeth*, *Il Corsaro*, *Stiffelio*, *Rigoletto*, *Traviata*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and *La Forza del Destino*. A tolerably bad poet, quite wanting in invention, Piave was not without a certain skill as librettist, and he had, from Verdi's point of view, the overwhelming quality of effacing himself completely, of putting aside every kind of personal vanity, and of following entirely the indications and the desires of the composer, cutting out this, paring down that, shortening or expanding at the will of the latter,—giving himself up, in short, to all his exigencies, whatever they might be. "El mestro vol cussi e basta" ("The master wishes it so, and that is enough"), said he in Milanese dialect; and in that way he justified his action, and maintained his opinion. Consequently Verdi had a lively affection for this modest *collaborateur*, whom he found always trustworthy, always yielding, always in good humour, and devoted to him body and soul. And when poor Piave was attacked by a terrible malady, Verdi settled a pension on him, and as the unfortunate man was beset by the thought of leaving behind him a favourite little daughter without provision and without protection, Verdi undertook the charge of the child, and assured her future welfare.

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the subject, and the Venetian public received with acclamation the new work, which before the end of the same year was reproduced in fifteen towns of the peninsula: at Rome, Genoa, Florence, Padua, Leghorn, Sinigaglia, Brescia, Milan, Lucca, Bergamo, Bologna, Cremona, Treviso, and Trieste. Truth, however, requires us to state that *Ernani* was not received everywhere with the same favour as in Venice. Florence especially received it with somewhat marked coolness.

It is related that during the rehearsals of the work at the Fenice, Verdi had a narrow escape of a misunderstanding with his principal interpreter, Signora Loewe (who became afterwards Princess of Lichtenstein), who was charged with the part of Elvira (*doña Sol*). This brilliant singer, who had created Donizetti's *Maria Padilla* at Milan, showed herself very dissatisfied with her part, and said so openly; at which the composer was justly ruffled. This dissatisfaction arose especially from the opposition of the latter to the wishes of the *virtuosa*, who wanted the score of *Ernani* to finish with a final rondo in which she could display her *bravura* and execution. Piave saw no objection to this claim; he saw no harm in winding up *Ernani* in the same way as *Cenerentola*, and he had already written the words of the air in

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question. But when he showed them to Verdi, with the inevitable

"Voci di gioia,
Voci di giubilo,"

the latter went off in one of those fits of artistic wrath which the poet had long been accustomed to submit to with great philosophy. "Do you wish," said he, "to ruin the finest situation in the work?" In fact, he refused absolutely to lend himself to Loewe's caprice, and the latter showed herself much provoked. Success alone could calm her. The day of the performance *Ernani* triumphed completely, and the singer, for her part, had so much applause that she acknowledged her mistake. She wished then to appease Verdi, and to enjoy his good graces again; but the composer was huffed, and refused to make peace with her. He left Venice after the first performances of *Ernani*, and confined himself to sending her his card. It was only at the end of several months that he consented, in consequence of steps taken by the singer, to abandon his severity.

In the course of the autumn Signora Loewe happening to be at Bologna, where, in point of fact, she was playing *Ernani*, Verdi chanced to pass through that city on his way to Rome, and stopped there a few days; she heard of it, con-

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trived to send him a kind word, and the young master at once called on her. The reconciliation was complete. Two years later Verdi wrote for her the principal part in his *Attila*.

This is not the only incident which we have to relate on the subject of *Ernani*, of which the two other principal interpreters were the tenor Guasco (Ernani) and the bass Selva (Silva). Verdi sought out the latter from a second-rate stage, the Theatre San Samuele, where he was singing in a little opera of Ricci, *Il Diavolo Innamorato*, and chose him contrary to the wishes of the director of the Fenice, Count Mocenigo; this noble *impresario*, who had a high idea of the dignity of his undertaking, would not hear of a singer from so low a position, and it wanted all the firmness and strength of will of Verdi to make him yield. But the composer had again to struggle with the prejudices of this terrible director, who, in spite of the example given in Paris by the Comédie Française, would not allow a horn to be sounded on the majestic stage of the Fenice. "A horn at the Fenice!" cried he in a tone of indignation; "a horn! Such a thing has never been seen!" "Well, it will be seen," replied Verdi, without putting himself out, and, in fact, it was seen and heard also.

Last of all, Verdi came into collision again on

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this occasion with the paltry objections of the Austrian censure, which claimed nothing less than to suppress the grand scene of the conspiracy. It grew more lenient, however, and the scene was preserved on the sole condition that the poet should change a few of the verses; this did not prevent the vigorous chorus *Si ridesti il Leon di Castiglia* from renewing at Venice the patriotic enthusiasm of which Milan had set the example at the time of the performance of *Nabucco*.

In conclusion, *Ernani* is one of the works of Verdi the political career of which presents the most characteristic incidents, if not the most stirring. On this head I will relate a curious anecdote. It was at Rome, towards the end of 1847, at the time of the immense and short-lived popularity of Pope Pius IX., when, as is well known, the Italians for a time looked on him as the liberator and future saviour of their country. It lasted a very short time, but it is certain that the pontiff was then, especially in the eyes of the Romans, the object of a respect and an affection which bordered on adoration. *Ernani* was being played at the Tordinona Theatre, and every night the public applauded with frenzy certain pieces the dramatic situation of which, set to music by the composer with, as it were, a burning and

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inspired heat, excited the enthusiasm, and raised the patriotic passions, of the multitude. Then, instead of singing "A Carlo Quinto sia gloria e onor!" they sang "A Pio Nono," etc., and naturally tricoloured banners and cockades replaced the Austro-Spanish cockades and banners in the act of the conspiracy. At each performance they had this scene repeated. One night a person in the costume of the National Guard, up in the gallery, with one leg over the balustrade, the piece having been already repeated, kept on shouting, "Bis! Viva Italia! Viva Pio Nono!" Others joined in chorus, and the curtain rose for the third time. Still the fellow was not satisfied; he continued shouting, so that at last the public lost patience and hissed him. At that, redoubling his noise, and reaching the paroxysm of his patriotic fury, he took off his shako, and threw it into the pit; to his shako succeeded his tunic, then his waistcoat; the occupiers of the pit began to be nervous, fearing that he might throw himself over next; but he did worse than that: he drew his sword and hurled it with such violence, that it embedded itself in the stage, two steps from the footlights, in the midst of general alarm. At this moment an officer made his way to this madman, seized him, not without difficulty, and turned him out of the theatre,

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to the great joy of the public, delivered from such a dangerous nightmare.[1]

Eight months had not elapsed since the brilliant success of *Ernani*, when Verdi again challenged the judgment of the public. This time it was at Rome, at the Argentina Theatre of that city, that he brought out, on the 3rd November, a new opera, *I Due Foscari*,

[1] *Ernani* came out in Paris, at our Théâtre Italien, in the early days of January, 1846. But Victor Hugo objecting to the representation of a work which from a literary point of view was nothing but a clumsy mutilation of his drama, they were obliged to modify the action, to change the names and condition of the characters, and finally to give a new title to the opera, which took that of *Il Proscritto* (it was said that Verdi was prepared to put his name to a work with this title). Here are the details which the *Gazette Musicale* of the 11th January gave on this subject; it is unnecessary to say that I do not pretend to endorse in any way the opinions expressed on Victor Hugo and on Verdi by the writer of this article, signed P. S., that is to say Paul Smith, a pseudonym which concealed the person of an ex-vaudevillist, who had quarrelled with his trade, Edouard Monnais:—"It is evident therefore that Orlando the outlaw, the Venetian corsair, is Hernani; Andrea Ritti, the senator who raises himself to the dignity of doge, is Charles V., promoted to the imperial throne; Zeno is the original Silva, who has become father instead of uncle, a change which it is impossible to explain; Elvira is Doña Sol; the scene passes in Italy instead of in Spain; with these exceptions, it is the same action, the same intrigue, as extravagant, as ridiculous, as in the tragedy: M. Victor Hugo has not a word to say, and ought to be perfectly content. As to the public, it is a different thing; it was looking for the 'coming man,' and has seen nothing of the sort appear on the horizon. Whatever reservation one may make in pronouncing a judgment on a new composer, it is impossible not to feel, and not to declare that thus far at least genius is wanting in Verdi; that he is one of those musicians without original inspiration, endowed with more life and skill than his present rivals in the management of rhythm and orchestration, but quite inferior to those masters the last of whom gave us *Lucia* and *La Favorita*."

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the libretto of which he had again had written by his young *collaborateur* Piave. This work, although received without hostility by the Roman spectators, was less fortunate than the previous one, and it may be said that it never had much acceptance, either in Italy or elsewhere. It has always been looked on as one of the most colourless and least spontaneous productions of the master.[1]

But Verdi was again, thanks to an admirable and inspired artist, about to meet with a success, fugitive without doubt (for the work was still but of the second rank, and has not withstood the test of time), but very brilliant. The work was his *Giovanna d'Arco;* the artist was that touching and sublime Erminia Frezzolini, who died lately in the midst of the ruin of her powers, but at that time in all the brilliancy of her radiant youth, of her patrician beauty, of her incomparable voice, and of her marvellous talent. A writer has drawn the following portrait of Frezzolini, a little affected, perhaps, in some of its lines, but in which she reappears

[1] "Verdi wrote the music of this work immediately after that of *Ernani;* but the distance which separates one from the other is immense. It was his sixth opera, composed in 1844 for Rome, and sung by Mademoiselles Barbieri-Nini, Roppa, and Debassini. In 1846, *I Due Foscari* was given in Paris, with Mario, Coletti, and Grisi for interpreters. Its success was of the dullest, and we do not find that during the year it got brighter" (*Gazette Musicale* of the 16th November, 1856).

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living and animated to the eyes of those happy enough to know even in her decline this admirable woman, who was an artist without rival, and without second :—" She was dark; her great liquid eyes, shadowed by long black lashes, exhaled magnetic influences, in which passion melted into love. Nothing equalled the distinction of her figure, the elegance of her bust, the touching languor of her carriage. Her profile, that of an antique cameo, displayed a patrician pride, and her lips, her lips of tenderness, seemed to palpitate beneath the kisses of the lyric muse. Her voice, of velvet, slightly veiled by feeling, was the voice of the soul—a divine soul, carried away as though dying of the joys and the tortures of the heart. In truth it was not a voice, it was passion itself, which sang in her, vibrating, deep-seated, enthralling, like the divine echo of an ideal self. Never has there been seen on the stage a heroine more true to life, more pure, more eloquent. Her exquisite feeling of womanhood gave to her interpretation a modest charm, a poetry which transported you into the paradise of dreams. Her genius, formed of the quintessence of womanly sweetness and deep tenderness, filled the stage; it was a perfume at once sweet and overpowering, which took possession of the soul of her hearers with a sort of delicious

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emotion, and led all hearts captive." . . . At that time in the full flower of her spring, Frezzolini was in truth the ideal creature which one might dream of to embody the chaste heroine of Vaucouleurs in her physical and moral purity. Her angelic beauty produced an unspeakable impression in helmet and armour, and an Italian critic, recalling his recollection of that work, said of her:—"I see her again in that *Giovanna d'Arco*, where, at the grand scene of the coronation, she appeared to me like a vision from paradise, in the white costume of a warrior, with the standard of fleur-de-lys which she pressed to her breast, when, beneath the wonderful arch of her long black lashes, one saw her eyes shine—those eyes a glance from which went straight to the heart, and which then appeared to rise to heaven in an ecstasy of intense faith." . . .

It was therefore principally to Frezzolini that Verdi owed the temporary success of his *Giovanna d'Arco*. With this work the composer reappeared at that noble and glorious theatre of La Scala, which had always shown so much sympathy, but which, strange to say, he never after that time furnished with a new work. The public of Milan once more fêted him and received him with favour; but on this occasion the interpreter surpassed the work. That the

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work owed everything to her is proved by the fact that, on the one hand, *Giovanna d'Arco* did not meet elsewhere with the same success as at Milan, and, on the other, that the voice of Frezzolini having already suffered severely at the time when she visited France, the *cantatrice* did not dare to attempt so trying a part; the composer therefore positively refused to allow his work to be played in Paris, having no longer the inspired artist of early days to support it before a public which he dreaded. It was not till more than twenty years after, at the time of the triumphs of Adelina Patti on our Italian stage, that the master consented at last to relax his decision, and allow his *Giovanna* to be represented. It must be added, that, in spite of the presence of the young artist and the incontestable influence which she exercised on the public, the success was most modest. After a few performances the work was completely abandoned. Of *Giovanna d'Arco* hardly anything remains but the overture, which Verdi subsequently placed at the head of his first French opera, *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, and which he used still later in his *Aroldo*.[1]

[1] A book might be written simply recording the contests which Verdi's operas always had to undergo, before the emancipation of Italy, with the censure of the Italian States other than Piedmont. Here is another example. On the 26th October, 1847, was given at Palermo, at the Carolino Theatre, Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco*, that is to say they played the music

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Of *Alzira*, which was played at the San Carlo Theatre at Naples on the 12th August, 1845, I have nothing to say. I know not whether the poem of this work, written by Cammarano, is inspired by the *Alzire* of Voltaire; but this opera was not very successful, although sung by Signora Tadolini, Fraschini, and Coletti. With *Attila*, which saw the day at the Fenice, Venice, on the 17th March of the following year, Verdi met again the companion of his early efforts, the poet Temistocle Solera. More successful than *Alzira*, *Attila* did not, however, enjoy a long popularity; but at Venice it was warmly received, perhaps because the Venetians found in it another pretext for patriotic allusions and the opportunity of affirming their ardent desire of independence. The public of the Fenice rose with enthusiasm

of *Giovanna;* for the police could not bring themselves to allow the public to witness the figure of our admirable heroine, stirring up the French people, and calling them to battle to deliver their country from the yoke of the stranger. The words *country* and *liberty*, considered as subversive, were not allowed to exist at that time for the Italian people (which has too soon forgotten that it was France who permitted it to pronounce them). In short, it became necessary to change the subject, and to write another poem *under* the music of Verdi. "They have changed the poem; the French heroine has become a fellow-countrywoman of Sappho; she is called in the piece which has been arranged to the music of Verdi Orietta di Lesbo. These alterations are not of a nature to give interest to the score; such substitutions should never be made without the authorisation of the composer" (*France Musicale* of the 17th November, 1847).

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when they heard this air, which has remained famous among them :—

"Cara patria già madre e regina
Di possenti e magnanimi figli!" . . .

and further on at this verse :—

"Avrai tu l'universo, resti l'Italia me!"

the whole theatre, as if seized with frenzy, shouted with one voice : "A noi! L'Italia a noi!"

Out of Italy *Attila* was generally badly received. Brought out in London on the 18th March, 1848, and sung by Sophie Cruvelli, Gardoni, Belletti, and Cuzzani, it failed grievously, and a newspaper said: "It is not the fault of the artists if the work has made a complete *fiasco*, although it had one merit which all the other works of the same composer have not—that of brevity. Judge also of the effect by the money taken, which did not rise above eight pounds sterling!"[1] Some years afterwards, however, the same newspaper reported with a sort of enthusiasm the representation of *Attila* in Paris. It is true that it was simply to bring forward Sophie Cruvelli, who, then in the splendour of her rich voice and statuesque beauty, appeared in a fragment of this work, in which she produced a startling effect. At this time a sort of strife had been established

[1] *Gazette Musicale*, 26th March, 1848.

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on our Italian stage between this justly admired singer and another extremely remarkable artist, Anna de Lagrange. "It is perhaps," said the journal in question, "to the noble desire not to leave the last triumphs to her rival that we must attribute the appearance of Sophie Cruvelli in the prologue of *Attila*, a startling appearance, a meteoric adieu! Ah! what a magnificent heroine, what a sublime warrior, is Sophie Cruvelli! What a formidable Joan of Arc, one who would not allow herself to be burnt! We have already seen in *Nabucco* how nobly she bears arms. In *Attila* she is better still. We demand *Attila* in its integrity, in order that Sophie Cruvelli may finish singing to us the part of Odabella, which she left behind her like a fiery arrow. We look on her as under an obligation to return next year, for no other reason than to pay the debt she owes us."[1] *Attila* was not represented at the Italiens, but there was serious talk of having it translated for the Opera at the time of the appearance and great success of *Il Trovatore* at that theatre. It was, however, never played in Paris, either at the Opera or elsewhere.[2]

We now come to one of the most interesting works of Verdi, but one which, although very

[1] *Gazette Musicale*, 29th May, 1853.
[2] V. Scudo, *L'Année Musicale*, 2e année, p. 177.

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successful in Italy, never became so abroad; I speak of *Macbeth*, which was produced at La Pergola, Florence, on the 14th March, 1847, that is to say a year, almost to a day, after *Attila*. Before giving the history of this work, I wish to call attention to the reminiscences devoted to the subject of Verdi by another famous artist, the sculptor Giovanni Dupré, the descendant of an ancient French family long settled in Italy.

An artist purely of the classical school, celebrated by several remarkable works—a Cain, an Abel, a Pietà, etc.—Dupré, who was Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and a corresponding member of our Académie des Beaux Arts, was counted among the number of the most ardent admirers of Verdi. Much taken up with music, like all his fellow-countrymen, and happening to be at Florence when the composer of *Nabucco* visited that town to mount his *Macbeth*, he wished to make the acquaintance of the young master, who was barely four or five years older than himself, and he has himself related, in a book of great interest,[1] the means by which he opened relations with him. I extract this short account :—

" . . . Giuseppe Verdi arrived then in

[1] *Pensieri sull' Arte e Ricordi Autobiografici di Giovanni Dupré.* Firenze, successori Lemonnier, 1879.

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Florence to put his *Macbeth* on the stage. If I am not mistaken, it was the first time he came among us; his reputation had preceded him; enemies, as is natural, he had many. I was familiar with the works he had produced up to that time: *Nabucco*, *I Lombardi*, *Ernani*, and *Giovanna d'Arco*. His enemies said that as an artist he was very vulgar, and a corrupter of the fine Italian song; and as a man they represented him as an unlicked cub, full of haughtiness and pride, disdaining to keep company with any one. I at once wished to satisfy myself on the point, and wrote a note to him in these terms: 'Giovanni Dupré begs the much-beloved *maestro* Verdi, quite at his leisure, to be kind enough to pay a visit to his studio, where he is on the point of finishing his Cain in marble, which he will be very glad to show him before sending it off.' But in order to see how far he really was a bear, I took it into my head to carry this letter myself, and to present myself as a young pupil of the artist. He received me with much politeness, read the letter, then turning to me, said:—

"'Tell your master that I thank him much, and that I will go and call on him as soon as possible, for I desired to know personally the young sculptor who . . . etc.'

"I answered:

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"'If you wish, Signor Maestro, to know this young sculptor in the quickest possible way, you can satisfy yourself at once, for I am he."

"He smiled pleasantly, then, shaking me by the hand, said :—

"'Oh ! it is a true artist's trick.'

"We chatted for a long time, and he showed me different letters of introduction which he had for Capponi,[1] for Giusti, and for Niccolini ;[2] the one destined for Giusti was from Manzoni.[3] We met nearly every day during the whole of his stay in Florence. We took walks in the environs to the Ginori household, to Fiesole, and to Torre del Gallo. We were a small group of five or six : Andrea Maffei, Manara, who died at Rome later, Giulio Piatti, Verdi, and myself. In the evening he allowed one or other of us to be present at the rehearsals of *Macbeth.* He often came of a morning, with Maffei, to my studio. He had an excellent taste in painting and sculpture, and discussed them with unusual intelligence ; he admired

[1] The Marquis Gino Capponi, politician, writer of the first rank, a descendant of one of the most ancient noble families of Florence, one which rivalled even the Medici. This great patriot, who was an eminent historian, died in 1876.

[2] Giuseppe Giusti and Giovan-Battista Niccolini, two of the greatest poets of modern Italy, both friends of Capponi, and high-spirited patriots like himself. Verdi allied himself with Giusti especially in close friendship.

[3] Alessandro Manzoni, the first in date of the romanticists, the immortal author of *I Promessi Sposi.*

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above all Michael Angelo, and I remember that at the chapel of the Canon Sacchi, situated below Fiesole on the old road, where a fine collection of works of art was to be seen, he remained nearly a quarter of an hour on his knees in contemplation before an altar attributed to Michael Angelo.

"I wanted to make a portrait of him, but, in consequence of circumstances beyond his control and my own, I was unable to put this project into execution, and I contented myself by making a model of his hand, which I carved in marble subsequently, and presented to the Philharmonic Society of Sienna, to which I have belonged since 1843. The hand of Verdi is represented in the act of writing; in removing the mould, the pen remained embedded in it, and it serves at the present time for a little sketch which I have made of St. Antoninus.

"He seemed satisfied with my Cain; that almost savage stateliness stirred his blood, and I remember that Maffei tried to persuade him that it would be possible to arrange from the *Cain* of Byron, which just at that time the poet was translating, a drama with those great effects of situation and contrast in which the genius and temperament of Verdi loved to move. The mild and pious character of Abel, thrown into contrast by that of Cain, seized with wild

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anger and envy at the sight of Abel's sacrifice, which was acceptable to Heaven; the contrast between their characters, Abel caressing his brother and speaking to him of God, and Cain disdainfully repelling his soft words, and at last breaking out in blasphemy against God; the choir of angels invisible in space, the choir of demons below the earth; Cain, blinded with anger, killing his brother; his mother rushing forward at the cry of Abel, whom she finds dead; then his father; then the young wife of Abel; the grief of all at the death of this righteous man; their horror of the murderer; the gloomy and sullen remorse of Cain; finally, his curse—all this formed an *ensemble* really worthy of the dramatic and Biblical (!) genius of Verdi. I remember that he was at this time apparently carried away with the idea; however, he made nothing of it, for which, no doubt, he had good reasons. Perhaps the nudity of the principal characters was the stumbling-block, but with the skins of beasts extremely picturesque tunics and garments can be made;[1] and in many ways it was possible to put such a subject to music, as it really offered powerful situations and effects, and Verdi had

[1] The poet Maffei and his friend the sculptor Dupré, corresponding member of the Académie des Beaux Arts, were really delightfully wanting in a sense of the ridiculous!

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always displayed in his works an admirable loftiness of genius which suited so terrible a drama. He who could originate the grand and serious melodies of *Nabucco*, the plaintive airs of *Trovatore* and *Traviata*, and the local colour, the style, and the sublime harmonies of *Aïda*, could certainly put *Cain* to music. If one day Verdi reads these lines, who knows?" . . .

Verdi, I imagine, has thought no more of *Cain* for many a day; but he made a great success at Florence with *Macbeth*, a success which his principal interpreter, Signora Barbieri-Nini, who was admirable in the character of Lady Macbeth, often changed into a veritable triumph. The other parts were taken by Brunacci, Varesi, and Benedetti.[1] What one has some difficulty in believing, the subject of *Macbeth* being in question, is that this work, represented at Venice a short time before the revolution of 1848, almost excited riots there,

[1] In a letter on the present state of music in Italy, published by the *Gazette Musicale* of the 27th March, 1847, in which the writer reports the warm reception which the Florentines had just given to *Macbeth*, we read as follows:—"I speak of blind admirers; I want a stronger word, for—could you imagine it?—at Milan they have printed a lithograph representing Verdi crushing under his feet the composers of the past, having one foot on the head of Rossini. If the latter knows it, how he must laugh! He might by way of vengeance frame the print and hang it up in his *salon;* but neither he nor any one is justified in supposing that a master such as Verdi has had any hand in such an indignity! Verdi ought not to bear the ridicule of it."

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and was again the subject of patriotic and tumultuous manifestations, exactly as *Attila* was. Nothing, however, is more true. At that time, when the imagination of the Italians was raised and excited beyond measure, everything that passed at the theatre became the cause of allusions, and the public allowed no opportunity of expressing its feelings to escape.

A Spanish tenor named Palma, a warm Liberal, whose heart beat in unison with that of the populace, played at Venice the part of Macduff. In the third act he had to sing the famous air—

"La patria tradita
Piangendo c'invita;
Fratelli, gli oppressi
Corriamo a salvar."

With a look of fire, a flashing eye, an inspired expression, a tricoloured cockade on his hat, Palma sang this air with so much earnestness, so much fervour, such enthusiasm, such ardour, that the whole house was electrified, and the public, becoming inflamed by his vigorous accents, set to work to sing in chorus with him, going so far as to shout patriotic, and naturally "seditious" cries. This air, says an Italian, seemed destined to be the match which set light to the powder. The matter became one day so grave, that the police judged it necessary to get the Austrian Grenadiers to intervene to

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maintain "order," and to impose silence on the "seditious."[1]

It was on the occasion of the successful performance of *Macbeth* at Florence that Verdi received from his countrymen, so lavish of this kind of display that it has become somewhat troublesome, the first public testimony of their sympathy and admiration. The young Prince Joseph Poniatowski, a *dilettante* composer, who by naturalisation had become a Tuscan subject, till he was made a French citizen and senator of the Second Empire, presented him, in the name of several of his admirers, with a crown of laurel in gold, each leaf of which bore inscribed on it the title of one of his works.

If *Macbeth*, thanks more especially to the particular circumstances which I have just related, became up to a certain point popular in Italy, it did not obtain the continued and prolonged success which some other great works of the master achieved. It was still less

[1] It is scarcely known that the verses of the two strophes which compose this piece are by the great poet Andrea Maffei, the friend of Verdi. The former had been entreated by the master to write him a libretto; but he had avoided doing so, feeling unable to yield to his requirements. However, to be agreeable to him, he wrote not only *La Patria Tradita*, but also the words of the Witches' Chorus, which inspired Verdi with music so strange, so picturesque, and so full of colour. Any one reading these choruses of Maffei will see the distance which separates his vivacious and expressive poetry from the indifferent verses which poor Piave perpetrated.

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happy in foreign countries, and in France especially. Under its second form, its fortune was no better. It will be remembered that in 1865 (April the 21st) *Macbeth* was given at our Théâtre Lyrique, which was then flourishing, and enjoying general support. It was not a question of a simple translation, but of an adaptation specially prepared with a view to the French stage. The new libretto was drawn up by MM. Nuitter and Beaumont, and the composer, anxious to please the Parisian public, had not only modified his work, but had rewritten half the score. The new parts were in the highest degree remarkable, the general effect was profoundly moving, and of rare power, but yet, in spite of its great qualities, in spite of a superb interpretation, which had been entrusted to three artists of a capacity and talent of high quality—Madame Rey-Balla, MM. Ismaël and Montjauze—*Macbeth*, thus rewritten (*rinnovato*, as the Italians say), was received with respect, but obtained with us a comparative success only. The novelty once exhausted, it dropped out of notice. Since then sometimes one, sometimes the other, version has been played in Italy.[1]

[1] Verdi dedicated the score of *Macbeth* to his benefactor Antonio Barezzi, whose daughter, it will be remembered, he married, in the following terms :—

"MY DEAR FATHER-IN-LAW,—I have always had it in my

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thoughts to dedicate an opera to you, who have been my father, my friend, and my benefactor; up to the present time imperious circumstances have prevented me. Now that I am able, I dedicate to you my *Macbeth*, which is one of my favourite works. The heart offers; may the heart accept!

"Your very affectionate

"GIUSEPPE VERDI."

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CHAPTER VII.

Jérusalem (*I Lombardi*) at Paris.—Last "creation" of Duprez at the Opera.—*I Masnadieri* in London.—Failure of this work.—Verdi writes at Paris *Il Corsaro* and *La Battaglia di Legnano.*—*Il Corsaro* is performed without success at Trieste, *La Battaglia di Legnano* at Rome.—Again in Paris he writes *Luisa Miller*, the performance of which takes place in Naples.—Difficulties on the subject of this opera.—Verdi and the Neapolitans.—Renewed success.

THE name of Verdi had forced itself rapidly not only on the sympathy of the Italians, his countrymen, but also on the notice of the foreigner. France, which is never backward in hailing glories from without, had not hesitated in giving a reception to the young master, and was prepared to welcome his *Lombardi*, baptised anew with the name of *Jérusalem*, on her foremost lyric stage. We have seen the result. On her own account, England demanded of the composer a work written expressly for her, and it was then that Verdi wrote his score of *I Masnadieri*. The manager of the great Italian stage in London, Her Majesty's Theatre, was at that time the famous Lumley. The original subject for the new opera appears at first to have been *King Lear*, but that was soon given

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up, the subject leaving no room for the tender passion so essential in a lyric work; Shakespeare therefore yielded the position to Schiller, and it was from the works of the latter that it was decided to choose the plot which Verdi was to put into music. One of the most eloquent writers of Italy, "the poet with the tongue of honey," Andrea Maffei, of whom we have spoken above, the translator of Gessner, of Milton, and of Thomas Moore, deciding at last to associate his muse with that of his friend, compiled for him the libretto of *I Masnadieri*, from the celebrated drama of Schiller, *Die Räuber*. Verdi had promptly completed the composition of his score, and the work, of which the composer himself conducted the performance, was represented in London on the 22nd July, 1847. It was not successful, in spite of the appearance of enthusiasm which greeted the first performance. Here is what was written on the subject from London to a Paris newspaper :—

"*I Masnadieri*—that, you know, is the title of the new opera which Verdi has just produced at Her Majesty's Theatre; but what perhaps you do not know is that the piece is another imitation of the too famous *Brigands* of Schiller. I should have preferred, I confess, another title and another subject. I remember that

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twelve or thirteen years since Mercadante also worked on this text, which did not bring him luck. He wrote his score of *I Briganti* for the Theâtre Italien of Paris, as Verdi has written his for that of London.[1] I shall never forget the prodigious outbreak of hilarity which greeted Lablache when he came out of a dark tower in which he was supposed to have languished for long years, the victim of thirst! . . . Mercadante's music has left no other impression.[2]

"As to that of Verdi, I will tell you frankly that I am of the opinion of the critics, who are far from regarding it as his *chef-d'œuvre*, and I have no need to tell you what I think in general of the *chefs-d œuvre* of Verdi. Paris and London are unanimous in that respect: the *maestro* has succeeded no better in one city than in the other. It may be prejudice, bad taste, injustice, as certain people pretend; it may be so. I have no wish to contradict them. It is open to them to appeal to the future; I occupy myself only with the present time.[3]

[1] The opera of Mercadante was represented at Paris the 22nd of March, 1836.

[2] It is well known that Lablache, formed like Hercules, was of colossal stature, and stout in proportion. By a singular coincidence, he undertook the same character in *I Masnadieri* which he had already played in *I Briganti*.

[3] It is certain that, in spite of the interest attaching to the name of Verdi and the almost overwhelming curiosity excited among us by the success which he gained from his fellow-

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"But the present, I shall be answered, is an immense success, an incomparable performance, an enthusiasm without equal! 'What! have you not heard the thunders of bravos which commenced the instant that Verdi appeared in the orchestra, bâton in hand, and which ceased only with the fall of the curtain? Do you count for nothing the tempest of furious *encores*, the frenzied recalls, with which Jenny Lind, Gardoni, Lablache, Coletti, were assailed?' Ah, yes! I have seen all, heard all, I have taken all into account; but I am so used to these things, that, with the best will in the world, it is impossible for me to be quite taken in by them. Mithridates has arrived at the point of not being able to die of poison.

"The musical system of Verdi is familiar to you; there does not exist an Italian composer more incapable of producing what is commonly called a melody.[1] If you add that he never writes an overture, you arrive at the knowledge of how far his powers extend in the direction of inspiration, and in the direction of science. In his new opera, no overture, as usual; but in

countrymen, the first works of the master were actually received at the time of their appearance on our Italian stage with an extreme reserve. This is intelligible, however, as his first works were far from being his best.

[1] For a long time, in fact, and strange as it may appear, they persisted with us in refusing Verdi the gift of melody.

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revenge a kind of introduction, in which stands out a phrase played most charmingly by Piatti. The first chorus of *I Masnadieri*, or *Brigands*, sung in the wings, has nothing remarkable; I should say as much of the air of Carlo, *O mio castel paterno*, if it were not sung by Gardoni with great *verve* and warmth. Gardoni represents the nobly criminal brother, the heroic brigand; Coletti the cowardly and hypocritical brother. The latter comes on also and sings an air, with accompaniment of *violoncello obbligato;* and then Amalie, in the person of Jenny Lind, appears in her turn, preceded by a little symphony for wind instruments, which is of more value than the air which follows, *Lo sguardo avea degli angeli.* Jenny Lind is really to be pitied for being condemned to sing such an air, which suits neither her voice nor the voice of any one. I willingly give praise to the *duo* of the father, Maximilian Moor, and Amalie. The father is Lablache, Amalie is Jenny Lind, and you may suppose that they execute their *duo* with rare perfection. The quartet which finishes the act contains equally good points; singers and composer were recalled with uproar.

"In the second act is found the principal piece, the grand *scena* sung by Jenny Lind, in which I am bound to say that Verdi has shown

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himself more vocal than usual. The piece begins with a *largo* full of expression, *Tu del mio Carlo al seno*, and winds up with a triumphant *cabaletta*, *Carlo vive*. One must have heard Jenny Lind in the two parts, so strongly contrasted, of this scene, in which, learning that Carlo still lives, she passes from the deepest grief to the most lively joy, to form an idea of the talent which she displays and of the effect which she produces. It is impossible to carry dramatic energy farther, and at the same time to practise the refinements of art with a more exquisite and more certain command of means. At this point, enthusiasm and excitement could contain themselves no longer; the whole house rose to recall the singer and to compel her to repeat her air, however fatiguing, however impossible such a *tour de force* might be, and Jenny Lind was compelled to submit; she was compelled to take her triumph with patience, happy, doubly happy, in being able to get safely to the end.

"After that air there is a duet for Amalie and Francesco; there are choruses of brigands, which resemble quadrilles by Musard, and these choruses wind up the second act. After this act there is a third, and after the third a fourth; but I will ask your permission to tell you nothing about them, for the constant *decrescendo*

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seemed to me to make itself felt, so that I should be reduced to use too frequently the same form of words; this in the end would become as tiresome to me as to your readers. The final trio, sung by Jenny Lind, Lablache, and Gardoni, is nothing but the moonlight of the final trio of *Ernani*, if only you allow that the latter is sunshine." . . .[1]

It is certain that the success of *I Masnadieri* was absolutely negative. We are assured of this by these lines from the *Court Journal* of London, which informs us that the work disappeared from the *répertoire* after three performances:—"The failure of Verdi's opera *I Masnadieri* is proved by its disappearance from the bills. Performed a second time on Saturday, with Verdi as conductor, it was played again on Thursday, under the direction of Balfe. A more thorough study of the music has confirmed the first impressions which we formed of its weakness, and we regret that Mr. Lumley has thrown away his care and his trouble on a thing of so little value. Verdi has left England profoundly disgusted, as one may believe, with the stupidity of the connoisseurs of London, who without hesitation have condemned his work as in their opinion beneath mediocrity."

Well grounded as such a judgment may be,

[1] *Gazette Musicale* August 1st, 1847.

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it is to be regretted that it should have been expressed in so uncompromising a way, considering the position of the artist in question. However that may be, the failure of *I Masnadieri* is incontestable, and the weakness of the work is borne out by the fact that even in Italy it never obtained success. It was no more lucky in France, where, in addition, it was brought out under conditions but little favourable, on a stage of proportions far too confined for a work of that kind. On the 3rd February, 1870, at the little theatre L'Athenée, at present no longer existing, the translation of *I Masnadieri*, under the title of *Les Brigands*, was given, with Mademoiselle Marimon in the part created previously by Jenny Lind. *Les Brigands* obtained but a small number of representations.[1]

In leaving Italy for London to direct the rehearsals of this work, the fate of which was to be so unfortunate, Verdi stopped in Paris, where he had made arrangements for the immediate production of *Jérusalem*. He returned to it shortly to mount that opera, staying there for several months, and had no thought of going back to his own country till the first outbreak of the Italian revolution of March, 1848, which, succeeding to that which

[1] The translation was the work of M. Jules Ruelle.

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had just burst forth in Paris, caused him to leave for Milan. He hoped to find that town, which he loved, and where he had obtained his first successes, free. But stopping a moment at Lyons, he there received the news of the painful reverses which had succeeded the favourable chances of the first days of the insurrection, and with a sore heart he wrote to the friend who had sent him this news: "I hope at least that you have done your duty!" After having, however, made his way into Italy, he returned here at the end of a short time, installed himself at Ranelagh, a very charming abode during the heats of summer, and there he wrote two new operas which he had engaged to compose: one for Trieste, *Il Corsaro;* the other for Rome, *La Battaglia di Legnano.*

For a moment, however, Verdi was on the point of becoming *chef d'orchestre;* the opposition of one of his publishers prevented him accepting the brilliant offers which were made to him with this object. These are the facts. Lumley, the lessee of Her Majesty's Theatre in London, where Italian opera was performed, and where *I Masnadieri* had just been brought out, found himself face to face with a formidable combination. A second Italian theatre was established at Covent Garden, and the director of this rival stage by a master-stroke had

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carried off his *chef d'orchestre*, the celebrated Michael Costa, whose renown was immense and deserved. Lumley wishing, on his part, to reply by a brilliant stroke, offered Verdi an engagement for three years as *chef d'orchestre* of this theatre, an engagement made complete by the advantage that the composer was to write, and put on the stage, each year a new opera. The offer was seductive, and Verdi was disposed to accept it; but, on the other hand, he had an engagement with an Italian publisher, Francesco Lucca, an engagement by which he had engaged to write for him two operas; one, *I Masnadieri*, was delivered, but the second was yet to be composed, and Lucca, who had already made arrangements with different theatres for the performance of the latter, would not allow Verdi to withdraw from his obligations. Verdi found himself, therefore, forced to decline Lumley's propositions; somewhat in bad humour, and, moreover, somewhat out of health, he set to music for Lucca the libretto of *Il Corsaro*, refused to superintend the preparation and rehearsals of the work, and received for the score, as specified by the terms of the agreement, the sum of twenty thousand francs (£800). Immediately after *Il Corsaro*, he composed *La Battaglia di Legnano*, which

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had been ordered by the administration of the Argentina Theatre in Rome.

His friend Piave had borrowed the subject and the title of *Il Corsaro* from the celebrated poem of Byron, which, in spite of the powers of his interpreters, Signore Barbieri-Nini and Rampazzini, Fraschini and De Bassini, obtained no success on its production at the Grand Theatre of Trieste, on the 25th October, 1848. We are assured that the composer himself was never satisfied with this work, produced under unfortunate conditions, and that he willingly condemned it. It was a few months later that he gave at Rome his *Battaglia di Legnano*. Sung by Signora de Giuli, Fraschini, and Collini, the latter was more fortunate, at least at the time of its first production, for subsequently its luck was not much better. Its momentary success is to be attributed especially to the state of feeling in Italy, at that time very highly wrought, and to the patriotic subject of the libretto.

It is, moreover, curious to see what has been written on this head upon the *political* nature of the musical genius of Verdi. Signor Basevi, in his study on the master, touches on the question incidentally by a concise comparison between the artistic character of Rossini and that of Verdi.

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"This great genius" (Rossini), says he, 'began to shine at the time when Italy, and in common with Italy the whole of Europe, worn out by the wars of Napoleon, earnestly desired peace. The character of the genius of Rossini is at one and the same time warlike and peaceful: warlike by the fact of the deep impressions left on the memory by past events; peaceful in the aspirations of his soul. The music of Rossini is unrestrained, free, open, vehement, enthusiastic as a soldier, and it is, at the same time, gay, agreeable, joyous, sensual as an Epicurean. The Pesarese of right represents his epoch. . . . Verdi may be looked on as the opposite pole to Rossini, even as the times of the one differ from the times of the other. Rossini obtained admiration at an epoch when the world was passing out of a period of convulsions to enter upon an era of peace and tranquillity; while Verdi appeared at a time when the nations, satiated with tranquillity, were ready to venture on the stormy sea of political commotions. Compared with that of Rossini, the genius of Verdi is equally free, unrestrained, vehement as a soldier; but it differs in that it is brusque, passionate, irritable, gloomy, or convulsively gay, like a hypochondriac.

"To Verdi, who since 1842 has reigned

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alone in Italy, is well applied the name of representative of the musical taste of his time. As such he was bound to write an opera in harmony with the new state of feeling in the year 1848. And this he did. . . . The labours of Italy were ready to arrive at their conclusion when in January, 1849, *La Battaglia di Legnano* was put on the stage in Rome."[1]

On the other hand, this is what an Italian journal, *Il Pungolo*, wrote when at the end of 1861 *La Battaglia di Legnano*, which had not previously been played at Milan, made its first appearance at the theatre of La Scala (the 23rd November):—

"The music of *La Battaglia di Legnano* is certainly not the best among Verdi's compositions. It wants that which forms his characteristic excellence—local colour; it wants something more, that *ensemble*, that 'keeping,' which make of the music of his different works a sort of logical connection of musical ideas, which succeed each other rapidly with so close a bond that it is not possible to alter or displace one without destroying the whole idea in its development, and in its synthesis.

"In *La Battaglia di Legnano*, one sees the seams, so to speak, of the different pieces, and that so clearly, that often it appears to be a

[1] *Studio sulle Opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, pp. 148—150.

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work made of shreds and patches; it is, in short, music of the present time, and it has all the defects of its kind: sonorous phrases, redundant but empty, declamation substituted for sentiment, emphasis for fervour, rhodomontade for grandeur, conventionality for conviction.

"It would be a curious study for the critic to ascertain the reason why great and robust geniuses, when they have wished to present the actual in art,—in prose, in verse, or in music, the form makes but little difference,—have completely deceived themselves.

"The two Italian revolutions have passed without being embodied in any song, and if the French Revolution produced the Marseillaise, it is to be remarked that the latter is not due to the inspiration of an artist, but that it rang out from the agitated heart of a *proscrit*.

"Art has need of the future or of the past to inspire either its hopes or its recollections, which are its true and legitimate muses. The present always frets it and suffocates it.

"How strange! You feel more of the agitation, more of the din of the Italian revolution, in *Nabucco* and in *I Lombardi*, written when the revolution was latent, shut up in the mind, subdued in its aspirations—you feel it, I say, much more than in this *Battaglia di Legnano*, written in Rome in 1849, when the revolution was at

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its height, than when from aspirations it was transformed into facts, from the imagination it had passed into the domain of reality.

"From 1849 onwards, during ten years of national strife and protests, Verdi carried on politics in music, as we have all done in literature and humour; he carried on politics in music, because, perhaps, without being himself conscious of it, he drew from the restlessness and tumult of his soul a kind of music which responded precisely to the restlessness and the tumult of our minds; but when these tumults, these spasms, burst forth, then he no longer sought for subjects of the present day to render extrinsic in action the sentiments which he had divined so marvellously when they were shut up in the mind of the public for whom he wrote. And he no longer sought them, precisely for the reason that his *Battaglia di Legnano* convinced him that it is impossible to pursue at the same time art and realism."[1]

These quotations do not seem to me useless, inasmuch as they are characteristic, and because they teach us the opinion of the Italians themselves, the fellow-countrymen of Verdi, on the political tendencies, intentional or involuntary, real or latent, which have been attributed, in

[1] *Feuilleton* of the *Pungolo* of Milan of the 25th of November, 1861.

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his own country or elsewhere, to the genius of the master. It is for that reason alone that I have enlarged so much on *La Battaglia di Legnano*.[1]

Verdi, who had left France to go and direct the rehearsals of *Il Corsaro* at Trieste and *La Battaglia di Legnano* at Rome, returned to it almost as soon as this last work had been performed, and installed himself in Paris, at No. 13, Rue de la Victoire. But this time he was not able to remain long. It is well known with what virulence the cholera broke out in Paris in the summer of that year 1849, and the number of victims which the scourge carried off. Verdi was not at all apprehensive on his own account, but his father, very anxious for him, wrote letter upon letter beseeching him to return to Italy to escape the dangers of the epidemic. He decided therefore to yield to his father's affectionate entreaties.

In addition to that, he had written here the score of *Luisa Miller*, for which he had a commission from the *impresario* of the San Carlo Theatre at Naples, and the time approached when he was compelled to visit that city to prepare and direct the rehearsals of that work. However, as a very complicated system of

[1] The libretto of *La Battaglia di Legnano* was by the poet Salvatore Cammarano.

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quarantine for travellers arriving from France by sea or land had been organised in each of the innumerable States into which Italy was then divided, Verdi preferred to go through it in Rome rather than in the little town of Nisida, where the Neapolitan Government had established its lazaretto. It was to Rome then that he went, and from Rome that he bent his steps towards Naples, where he arrived just at the moment when the administration of the San Carlo Theatre, which for a long time had been in difficulties, had declared itself bankrupt. Grievously surprised at this intelligence, Verdi prepared to go back, when the superintendent of the royal theatres, the Duke di Ventignano, put forward the extraordinary claim of preventing his departure without the delivery of his score, at the same time refusing to pay him the three thousand Neapolitan ducats (twelve thousand seven hundred and fifty francs, *i.e.*, £510) which constituted the price arranged in advance for it. With a man of Verdi's disposition, such a claim, which might pass for an ingenious joke, ran a great risk of not succeeding. It succeeded indifferently, in spite of the obstinacy of the noble personage. The composer having declared that he had no intention whatever of yielding to the demands of the Duke, the latter wished to take advantage

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of a whimsical law still in force, a law by which it was forbidden any artist whatever to leave Naples unless his passport had received the *visa* of the superintendent of the theatres. It is related that a colloquy in a loud voice was held one day on the subject, *coram populo*, between the functionary possessed with this notion and Verdi, who talked to him from the window of his apartment at the Hotel de Russie. Out of patience, the latter wound up by saying to his interlocutor, and pointing out with his finger a French frigate moored in the harbour to serve as refuge to persons compromised in the recent political events: "Very well! if you insist, you will have to come and fetch me on board the vessel you see there!" Finding that he could do nothing else, His Excellency took the only course which he could take to retain Verdi: he sent him the three thousand ducats, and, the affairs of San Carlo being arranged, they were able to begin the rehearsals of *Luisa Miller*.

We have seen that *Alzira*, given in 1845 at this same theatre, San Carlo, obtained but a moderate success, in spite of the renown which Verdi had already acquired by his previous works. The friends whom he had in Naples, with the superstition usual in that country, had maintained that the unhappy fate of that work was due to the influence of the composer

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Capecelatro, an amateur musician whose talent was open to question, but who passed in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen for an accomplished *jettatore*. Now the mischievous influence attributed to the "evil eye" by the Neapolitans is well known. They therefore wished on this occasion to do everything possible and impossible to avert the unlucky influence of Capecelatro; the result was a somewhat burlesque situation, out of which in France an amusing farce might have been made.

Scarcely had Verdi set foot in Naples, and become installed at the Hotel de Russie, when his friends, to prevent any meeting between him and the dreaded *jettatore*, began to mount guard at his door, without stirring an inch, relieving each other on duty as best they could in unfailing succession. Did Capecelatro appear at the hotel? Presto! he was sent about his business without pity. Did he protest? Harshness had to be used In short, they forced him to go at once. But being on duty at the lodging did not constitute the whole of the labour of these faithful and vigilant guardians. As soon as Verdi went out he was surrounded by a little group of friends, who did not leave him alone a moment, but accompanied him everywhere—to the theatre, to the restaurant, for a

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walk. Their sole efforts were directed to a single end: to prevent Capecelatro speaking to him, touching him, even approaching him. Possibly these proceedings were not always to Verdi's taste, and I suspect that this absolute want of solitude, this forced society, did not fail to provoke and annoy him sometimes. But how could he be angry with such devoted friends, who were acting in his interest only? The best thing was, without doubt, to bear with it, at the cost of a little inward grumbling.

Be this as it may, these novel body-guards were untiring, and courageously persevered in their campaign to the end. The production of *Luisa Miller* took place at San Carlo on the 8th December, 1849, without Capecelatro having once succeeded in forcing the guard and approaching Verdi, and, naturally, the work obtained a great success.[1]

According to Signor Basevi, whom I have already had more than one occasion to quote, the score of *Luisa Miller* inaugurates with its

[1] Perhaps I am here saying a little too much. If I confide in an Italian account which I am about to transcribe, the success was actually not complete till after the first night, and that precisely by the fault of this terrible Capecelatro:—"The friends of Verdi had completely succeeded in preventing poor Capecelatro from speaking to the *maestro* until the day of the production of the opera. The first acts of *Luisa Miller* had obtained a complete success; all had 'gone' to a wish. They had got as far as the last act, which not only is the best of the work, but also, from its dramatic power and the immense

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composer a *second manner*. Up to that time, according to the critic, the composer had never got free in his works from an extraordinary straining, from a grandiose exaggeration, from something which we may describe as excessive emphasis, or grandiloquence. "In the second manner," says the writer, "the grandiose diminishes or ceases entirely, and each character represents nothing else than himself alone. Passion, from the moment that it is individualised, has no need of so much exaggeration; from this it results that the melody, however full of passion it may be, is developed with more calm. The vocal subjects are lighter and less broad; the rhythm more flexible and more apparent; the *motivi* in general easier to the ear, and more commonplace. The desire of tickling the ear to a large extent has in this second manner called into use the *parlanti*, which Verdi seemed to have condemned, so little did he employ them in his first manner.

force of the music, may be proclaimed a perfect masterpiece. Verdi was on the stage arranging the last groups, when a man, rushing from the wings, ran and fell on his neck; at the same moment a side scene broke loose and fell upon the stage; Verdi, happily perceiving it, made a great step backwards, dragging with him Capecelatro (it was he!), and the scene fell at the foot of the *maestro*, who had a narrow escape of being crushed while in the embrace of Capecelatro! But that was not all. The last act was begun, and it is not known wherefore, but its success was much less than that of the previous acts. After that go and disbelieve in *la jettatura* if you have the courage!"

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On the other hand, sonorous effects are much less used, and generally in a suitable manner. . . . In this second manner, Verdi resembles Donizetti to a great extent; the difference between them consists principally in this, that the former, having greater passion, more frequently aims at stirring and arousing the hearer, whilst the latter always seeks to charm him. *Luisa Miller* is the first work worthy of figuring at the head of the new manner of Verdi." [1]

Luisa Miller was produced in Paris, at our Théâtre Italien, on the 7th December, 1852. In spite of the appearance of Sophie Cruvelli, who played the part of Luisa (those of Rodolfo and Walter were taken by Bettini and Susini), the success was "discreet," as they say in Italy. It was still less when, a few weeks later, on the 2nd February, 1853, the work was performed at the Opera, where the Italian libretto, which Cammarano had arranged from a drama of Schiller's youth, was translated by B. Alaffre and Emilien Pacini. On this occasion the principal part was again entrusted to a singer of the first order, the admirable Angiolina Bosio,

[1] It seems to me difficult to allow that Donizetti had less passion than Verdi. In respect of passion, the composer of *Lucia* and *Lucrezia Borgia* has no need, in my judgment, to envy the composer of *Ernani* and *Rigoletto*. Each of them, however, expresses it in a different manner, by means which are peculiar to him, in conformity with his individual temperament.

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an artist of a talent so delicate and elegant, who was destined to leave us and die, in the flower of her age, among the snows of Russia; the other parts had for interpreters Mademoiselle Masson, MM. Gueymard, Morelli, and Merly. It was of no avail; *Luisa Miller* had so lukewarm a reception from the public that eight performances of it only were given.

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CHAPTER VIII.

Stiffelio at Trieste.—*Rigoletto* at Venice.—Immense success.—The *canzone* of the Duke of Mantua.—An adventure of the poet Piave.—Victor Hugo and Verdi.—Triumph of *Il Trovatore* at Rome, in Italy, and in Europe.—*La Traviata.*—Complete failure of this work in Venice.—Letter of Verdi on this subject.—After a year, and certain modifications made in the work, it recovered its position triumphantly, and ran through a brilliant career.—Opinion of an Italian critic on *La Traviata.*

I HAVE nothing to say about *Stiffelio*, a work—the score of which Verdi wrote to a libretto by Piave—which was represented without success at the Grand Theatre of Trieste on the 16th November, 1850. *Stiffelio* was given in several other towns with no better luck than at Trieste. Worked up again later, recast—*rimpastato*, as they say in Italy—both as regards the poem and the music, it was presented to the public anew under the title of *Aroldo*, but was never able to overcome its bad fortune.

We approach, nevertheless, the time of the greatest successes of the composer, and we are about to see, following close on each other, the three works of the master which have remained the most popular: *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, and *La Traviata.*

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It was not without trouble that *Rigoletto* succeeded in seeing the footlights; for a moment it was despaired of.

It is not generally known that, virtually, Verdi is himself the author of all his poems. That is to say, not only does he always choose the subject of his operas, but, in addition to that, he draws out the sketch of the libretti, indicates all the situations, constructs them almost entirely as far as regards the general plan, brings his personages and his characters on the stage, in such a way that his *collaborateur* has simply to follow his indications, to bring the whole together, and to write the verses.

Now Verdi had undertaken to compose a new opera for La Fenice at Venice, which kept in memory the success of *Ernani;* and the master wishing, once more, to take his subject from the dramas of Victor Hugo, had fixed his choice on *Le Roi s'amuse.* He had given his instructions to Piave, who at once set to work, and promptly furnished him with a libretto bearing the title of *La Maledizione.* But it was said that *Le Roi s'amuse* would arouse all the censures, and would be pursued with as much bitterness in Italy as in France.

It is well known how touchy in theatrical matters was the Austrian Government, which at that time pressed with all its weight on the un-

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fortunate Venetia. The censure, having been informed of the source from which Piave had taken the subject of his new libretto, at once put an embargo upon it, and would not allow either the subject, or even the title, although the latter at least was inoffensive enough.

The embarrassment of the direction of La Fenice, which thus found itself without a new opera, can be imagined. The *impresario* Lasina bewailed, the artists waited, and Piave, not knowing which way to turn, looked out for another subject for treatment. But the latter reckoned without Verdi, who held on tooth and nail to his libretto, and seemed inexorable. Either *Le Roi s'amuse*—that is to say, *La Maledizione*—or nothing!

What was to be done? Every one was in despair, every one was preparing to throw the handle after the axe, when the situation was saved by a *Deus ex machinâ* presenting himself—who would have believed it?—under the guise of a commissary of police. Yes, it was a commissary of police, of the name of Martello, a man not altogether wanting in literary taste, who came one day to Piave, and gave him, in an unlooked-for manner, the solution of the problem which the latter was vainly trying to resolve. That is, he pointed out to him unimportant, but nevertheless essential, modifications in his

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work, advised him to substitute for the character of the King that of the Duke of Mantua, and even furnished him with a new title — *Rigoletto, Buffone di Corte.* In a word, all was saved, thanks to the intervention, as effectual as it was unexpected, of this member of the police, who, it is well to remark, had distinguished himself by his zeal and ardour in pursuing Italian patriots, and in using them harshly. So true is it that in this world we should be surprised at nothing.

They had still to ascertain whether the slight modifications on the original draft would not too greatly stir up the wrath of Verdi. Fortunately it was not so, and Piave was able to work in security. But all these delays, all this indecision, leaving matters in uncertainty, had prevented the composer up to that time from writing a single piece of the score. It was necessary then for all concerned to work double tides. The poet had soon made the suggested alterations, the censure did not delay its approbation, and Verdi, in possession of his manuscript, took himself off to Busseto, *tête-à-tête* with his Fritz pianoforte, to work quietly and rapidly in the midst of complete solitude. His activity was so great, and his inspiration so favourable, that in the space of forty days the score was written and instrumented, the master

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back again in Venice, and *Rigoletto* was put in study, rehearsed, and represented, with a success which is well known, on March 11th, 1851.

A singular thing happened before the performance. When they came to study the fourth act, the tenor Mirate, cast for the part of the Duke of Mantua, perceived that a piece which he had to sing alone was wanting in his part.

"Mi manca un pezzo" ("There is a piece missing"), said he to the composer.

"Cè tempo; te lo daro" ("There is plenty of time; I will give it you"), replied the latter.

Every day the same demand was repeated, and every day the same reply was given. Mirate began to be anxious and out of patience, when at last, the evening before the orchestral rehearsal, Verdi brought him a paper on which was the famous *canzone*, "*La donna è mobile.*"

"Stop! read this," said he.

Mirate opened the paper, saw that the music was easy, and appeared enchanted.

"Mirate," then added Verdi, "you give me your word of honour that you will not sing this melody at home, that you will not hum it, that you will not even whistle it,—in a word, that you will allow no one whatever to hear it?"

"I promise," answered Mirate; and Verdi became easy.

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This is the reason of the mystery made by Verdi on this occasion. The master counted much, and with reason, on the effect of this *canzone*, of so new a rhythm, and so full of elegant ease. He knew, besides, that it was of a melodic turn easy to retain, and being aware of the powers of the Italians in this respect, he feared not only lest they should carry off his melody, but lest they should spread it abroad in Venice before the performance, and thus when it was heard in the theatre every one should accuse him of plagiary, instead of applauding his invention.

The recommendation made to Mirate was not, therefore, as one has seen, useless; but it would have been insufficient, as the master well knew. Therefore the day of the full rehearsal he addressed not only the orchestra, but the whole of the staff of the theatre, begging each person to keep it the most profound secret. The secret was well kept, and thus the effect of the song was prodigious. Even from the elegant opening passage of the violins the public was aroused by the form and freedom of the subject; and when the tenor had finished the first verse, thunders of applause broke out in the house, followed after the second by a formidable *encore*. It was a perfect triumph, as spontaneous as possible. And, in proof that

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the composer was right, that very same evening, on leaving the theatre, every one was humming the words and the music of the *canzone.*

Of course it soon became popular; all Venice was mad over it, and the men, they say, sang it in the streets into the ears of the women. There has even been told rather a piquant anecdote on this subject, of which Piave himself, the author of the words, was the hero.

He was walking one day in the streets of Venice, when he met a lady who had been dear to him, and who, a short time previously, had thought well to break off all relations with him, and to take up with other loves. Piave, as he passed near her, whispered between his teeth the first two verses of the famous *canzone*:—

"La donna è mobile
Qual piuma al vento."

The lady, stung to the quick, and wanting neither in spirit nor in readiness, did not give him time to finish, and going on with the air herself, sang it, substituting for the next two verses the following, which she improvised:—

"E Piave è un asino
Che val per cento."

It must be admitted that the signora was by no means polite; but, after all, the answer was fair warfare.

The success of *Rigoletto* was incontestable;

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nevertheless it *was* contested in Paris, where advocates at once too ardent, too clumsy, and too interested in his success, had raised up much ill-feeling against Verdi. The two brothers Escudier, proprietors of his works for France, and managers of a special newspaper, *La France Musicale*, did not cease to write up on every occasion, and beyond reason, even the weakest productions of the Italian master. Assuredly they were within their rights; but they went further, and in order to make their idol the more brilliant, they consistently endeavoured to throw discredit and contempt on all the musical works produced in France, and on all the writers who were not of their way of thinking. From this resulted annoying discussions, which caused the greatest injury to the artist whom these unskilful advocates pretended to defend; while in reality their only aim was to further the interests of their own commercial undertaking. Another journal, *La Gazette Musicale*, much more worthy of respect in the way it was carried on, but which this state of things had finally irritated, ended by taking a prejudice against Verdi, and showed itself unjust towards him. Thus, the latter, announcing the recent production of *Rigoletto* at Venice, published the following lines, which were evidently the reverse of the truth :—" The

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new opera of Verdi, *Rigoletto*, is written on the subject of *Le Roi s'amuse*. If it be true that good music can only be composed to a bad libretto, that of M. Piave should be a real California for the musician. Verdi has got out of it the best way he can. His score is poor in melodies, and entirely deficient in *pezzi concertanti*. It is evident that he has tried to make his instrumentation less noisy; that of *Rigoletto* is distinguished by a uniform character of calm and tranquillity. In attempting to model his harmony on the great masters of the German school, Italian criticism finds that he would not do badly to steep his ideas in the spring from which Rossini and Bellini drew their inspiration." [1]

To say that the libretto of *Rigoletto* was bad, that the score was deficient in concerted pieces (whereas at least we may point out the admirable quartet which every one knows [2]), that it was wanting in melodic ideas, was evidently deceiving itself in deceiving the public. Two years later, nevertheless, at the time when *Rigoletto* was performed in London, the *Gazette* persisted in its opinion, and printed as follows:— "*Rigoletto* has just been given at the Italian Theatre, Covent Garden. *It is the least strong*

[1] *Gazette Musicale*, March 30th, 1851.
[2] "*Un di, si ben rammento mi.*"

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of the works of Verdi which up to this time have been brought out in England. *Melody is wanting, and its absence is not compensated for by any fine concerted piece*, such as the composer has sometimes written. In spite of the talent of Ronconi, charged with the principal part, in spite of that of Mario and of Madame Bosio, this opera has not the slightest chance of maintaining itself in the *répertoire*."[1]

It was not till *Rigoletto* was at last played in Paris that the *Gazette*, being in a position to form a personal judgment of the work, consented to relax its severity. It did so with good grace, as follows:—"Verdi has undergone various phases; his work, which dates back eighteen years, and comprises about the same number of compositions, is divided into two or three epochs, the characters of which offer remarkably well defined shades of difference, and show a laudable effort of transformation. In the first place, there was the Verdi of *Nabucco*, *I Lombardi*, *Ernani*, and *I Due Foscari*, a genius bold, brilliant, we may even say hard and rough, even in his tenderest passages, the reverse of Quinault, the French poet, who expressed even hatred in a loving manner. This bold, unusual style had an advantage which could not fail it—that of making a sensation in a country

[1] *Gazette Musicale*, May 22nd, 1853.

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accustomed to all the sweets of melody, and of stirring it profoundly. But soon this abuse was felt, and the system of excess of energy quickly brought its fruits. It was then that Verdi plunged into the period of gloom occupied by *Giovanna d'Arco*, *Alzira*, *Macbeth*, *I Masnadieri*, *La Battaglia di Legnano*, *Il Corsaro*, all scores more or less sombre. That of *Luisa Miller* succeeded them, and showed that at least the composer was seeking to do something different from that which he had done up to that time. Verdi then wrote *Stiffelio*, which we have not heard, but which does not pass for one of his masterpieces, and then comes *Rigoletto*, produced in Venice on the 11th March, 1851, and in Paris on Monday last. That *Rigoletto* marks an immense progress in his style, we have no hesitation in declaring; we receive it as we received *Il Trovatore*, which was not given in Rome till two years later, but which again furnished a new proof of this progress.[1] Henceforth Verdi is no longer for us merely the composer, rough and fiery, carried away by force and noise, sacrificing charm and grace to an excess of sonorousness. In *Rigoletto* and *Il Trovatore* he is quit of all that. That is why

[1] Although actually played in Italy two years later, *Il Trovatore* had gained with us more rapidly the rights of citizenship, and had been offered to the Parisian public before *Rigoletto*.

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we, who have so often criticised him, to-day address him with nothing but eulogiums. If we change our style as regards him, it is because we find that he himself has begun to change it, on which we congratulate him sincerely."[1]

It was the 19th January, 1857, that *Rigoletto* appeared for the first time at our Théâtre Italien, where it was played and sung in an admirable way by Madame Frezzolini (Gilda), Marietta Alboni (Maddalena), Mario (the Duke), and Corsi (Rigoletto). It was the first true, undoubted success which Verdi made in Paris, but it was brilliant, and has never since become weaker. Nevertheless, it yet wanted several years before they ventured to transfer a work so profoundly stirring to one of our French stages; still there was no reason to complain of this delay, for on this occasion also the success was immense, and the work at once became popular. The Théâtre Lyrique, at that time very flourishing and managed with great spirit, had the glory of offering to the public, on the 24th December, 1863, the translation of *Rigoletto* due to M. Edouard Duprez, which was excellently interpreted by MM. Ismaël (Rigoletto), Montjauze (the Duke), Wartel (Sparafucile), and Mademoiselles

[1] *Gazette Musicale*, January 25th, 1857.

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de Maësen (Gilda) and Dubois (Maddalena).[1]

A space of nearly two years elapsed between the performance of *Rigoletto* at the Fenice and that of *Il Trovatore*, which was given at the Apollo Theatre in Rome on the 19th January, 1853. If ever the purely musical value of a lyric work can claim for itself alone the success which it receives, we must believe that *Il Trovatore* has a right, on this consideration, to very special mention, for the laboured libretto of this work, obscure and absolutely undecipherable, could do nothing to help its triumph. It is not generally known that the libretto was based by the poet Cammarano on a Spanish contemporary drama of the same title, a drama written in magnificent verse by a writer of seventeen years of age, on whose career, as we are about to see, it exercised a happy influence.

The young Antonio Garcia Gultierez, born in 1815, was in 1832 on the point of drawing for the conscription when he completed his drama *El Trovador*, which he took to the

[1] Just as he objected a short time previously to the performance of *Ernani*, Victor Hugo wished to prevent the performance of *Rigoletto* at the Théâtre Italien. He entered an action against M. Calzado, then director of that theatre, accusing him of offering to the public a work which was a mere counterfeit of *Le Roi s'amuse*. He lost his cause, the tribunal giving judgment against him, with costs.

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theatre Del Principe, where it was at once received and put in rehearsal. This happy chance, as far as his first work was concerned, only half consoled him, for he drew from the urn precisely the number 1, which gave him all possible rights of incorporation without delay in the national militia. Too poor to buy himself off, he was preparing therefore to don his uniform, postponing till later his dreams of literary glory, when the representation of his drama obtained such a success, that it allowed him to furnish a substitute, and to pursue his career in quiet. From that time Gultierez became one of the most fruitful, the most brilliant, and the most esteemed of the dramatic authors of Spain. I am willing to believe, moreover, that his drama was clearer, more transparent, and far more comprehensible than the strange libretto which has been taken from it for Verdi by his *collaborateur* Cammarano.[1]

This is all the information which I am able to furnish about *Il Trovatore*, on the subject of which I have nothing particular to observe, unless it be the eagerness, truly prodigious, which the Roman public, whose interest was excited in a lively manner by the new announce-

[1] Garcia Gultierez died at Madrid in the month of August, 1884. As to Cammarano, he did not live to witness the production of *Il Trovatore;* for he had himself disappeared from this world five months previously, in August, 1852.

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ment of a work by Verdi, evinced in taking part in the first performance. At that precise moment Rome was a prey to one of those floods to which the Tiber has long been accustomed, and the waves of the river invaded all the district and the streets in the neighbourhood of the Apollo Theatre. Well, in spite of everything—in spite of the cold, in spite of the mud, in spite of the inundation—from nine o'clock in the morning of the 19th January, the doors of the theatre were besieged by a numerous crowd of people, who, with their feet in water up to the ankles, squeezed, pushed, and disputed in order to get places for the performance of the evening. Such a concourse had never been seen, and when the work gradually unfolded before the public, impatient and greedy of emotions, magnificently sung by Mesdames Penco and Goggi, by Baucardé, Guicciardi, and Balderi, it obtained an immense and boisterous success, the echoes of which resounded in a short time from one end of Italy to the other. This success spread rapidly through the whole of Europe, for seldom was a work more fortunate than *Il Trovatore*.[1]

[1] It was *à propos* of *Trovatore* that the critic Scudo, who for a long time past had pursued Verdi with his sa casms, wrote the following:—"M. Verdi will have his place in the sun of our civilisation, and will be classed below Bellini, of whom he has neither the clearness nor the tenderness; after

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Towards the end of December, 1854, our Théâtre Italien presented it to its subscribers, with Mesdames Frezzolini and Borghi-Mamo, Mario, and Graziani for interpreters; on the 11th May, 1855, it was sung at Covent Garden Theatre in London by Tamberlik, Graziani, Mesdames Viardot and Jenny Ney; and in the month of December of the same year it made its appearance at St. Petersburg, where it was executed by Tamberlik and Debassini, Mesdames Bosio and de Meric. Everywhere it was received triumphantly. At last, on the 12th January, 1857, *Il Trovatore*, translated into French by Emilien Pacini, and called *Le Trouvère*, was represented for the first time at our Opera, and sung for her *début* by Madame Deligne-Lauters (who was very soon to become Madame Gueymard), by Madame Borghi-Mamo, who had played it at the Italiens, and by MM. Gueymard and Bonnehée. The composer had not touched his score, unless to add, in the third act, after the chorus of soldiers, a *divertissement* comprising four *airs de ballet*. At Paris also the success was very great; *Le Trouvère* reached its hundredth performance on the 25th January, 1863, and the two

Donizetti, of whom he possesses neither the *maestria*, the *brio*, nor the flexibility; and at so great a distance from Rossini, that the latter might consider him a *barbaro*" (*Critique et Littérature Musicale*, 1° série).

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hundredth was given in the course of the year 1872.[1]

We come to that one of the works of Verdi the destiny of which was the most singular. The *impresa* of the Fenice at Venice had asked him for a new work. The master, who, some months previously, had seen in Paris the fine drama of M. Alexandre Dumas fils, *La Dame aux Camélias*, had been struck with enthusiasm for it, and at once formed the project of making an opera of it. He therefore, according to his habit, gave his instructions to Piave, and the latter, following Verdi's own plan, drew up the libretto of *La Traviata*. The score of *La Traviata* was written almost concurrently with *Il Trovatore* (Verdi usually took four months to write an opera), and it was almost ready when the latter was given at Rome. That is why the performance of the new work was ready to be given in Venice on the 6th March, 1855, two months and a half only after that of *Il Trovatore*.

We must state the fact. *La Traviata*, which is without doubt one of the most original, the most touching, and the least exaggerated of the

[1] I ought to remark under this head, that the date of the 1st April, 1857, given in the *Histoire de la Musique Dramatique* of M. Chouquet as that of the production of *La Trouvère* at the Opera, is a mistake, resulting from a misprint (it is that of the production of *Marco Spada*). The 12th of January, as I state above, is really the true date.

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works which flowed from the pen of Verdi, made at its appearance a brilliant *fiasco*. Of this there is no doubt, for the very next day after the performance the master declared it himself in a laconic and significant note addressed to his pupil and one of his best friends, Signor Emanuele Muzio, a note which has been published in the *Gazzetta Musicale* (Milan) of the 15th March, 1853, of which the following is the tenor:—

CARO EMANUELE,—*La Traviata* iera sera fiasco. La colpa è mia, o dei cantanti? Il tempo giudicherà.

Sempre vestro,
G. VERDI.

DEAR EMANUELE,—*La Traviata* last night a failure. Was the fault mine or the singers'? Time will decide.

Ever yours,
G. VERDI.

This unexpected and undeserved check resulted from several causes, which I am about to enumerate.

First of all, Signora Donatelli, who represented Violetta, was by no means the person for the part, in spite of her very real talent. This singer was afflicted with an enormous stoutness, which deprived her of all grace and lightness; we can fancy what would become of the character with such a physique. On the other hand, the tenor Graziani, the victim of a

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violent hoarseness, found himself almost unable to sing on the day of the first performance. Finally, the baryton Varesi, furious at being cast for an apparently secondary part, the extreme importance of which he did not grasp, brought but very indifferent care to its interpretation.

That was not all. These artists were deeply troubled, one might say completely upset, by the special accent which distinguishes the score of *La Traviata*, by the novel, deep, and melancholic character of the music which the master exhibited, which differed so completely from the style to which he had accustomed them. Thus, disconcerted, wanting confidence in the work as well as in themselves, they were unable to bring out its beauties, its tender and touching character, and made no impression on the public, being naturally incapable of communicating an emotion which they did not feel themselves. It must also be added that at that time the piece was not played in the costume of Louis XIII., as at present, but in everyday dress, and that our modern costume, so chilling, so sad, so stiff, is not made to rejoice the eye of the spectator and to put him in a happy frame of mind.

In short, as we have seen, *La Traviata* was a complete *fiasco*. Only the first act, in which Signora Donatelli, a feeble actress, had at least

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the opportunity of exhibiting her great qualities as a *virtuosa*, was well received. But after that, everything went from bad to worse, and several incidents, for the most part burlesque, contributed to make the work fail miserably. In the second act, Germond's air, which is so pathetic, "*Di Provenza il Mare*," which was then repeated from one end to the other, appeared tedious and interminable; in the ball scene, the ridiculous details of the *mise en scène* began to put the public in good humour; as to the last act, it finished in the midst of uncontrolled general laughter, which was not precisely the effect which was expected from it. The Venetians, joyous and merry by nature, even somewhat frivolous, gave themselves up to wild delight when they heard a mountebank doctor, speaking of a good lady endued with such fine *embonpoint* as Signora Donatelli, declaring seriously that consumption left her but a few hours to live! So that when the curtain dropped on the last scene, mirth was at its height.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the master did not despair, and did not consider himself beaten by this unfortunate result. "Is the fault mine," said he in giving an account of it, "or the singers'?" And we may suppose that he thought the latter. And again, does not that last phrase, "il tempo giudicherà," show that

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he reckoned on appealing from a judgment which he looked on as unjust ? [1]

In fact, time, on which he had reckoned, was not long in proving that he was right. At the end of about a year, *La Traviata* was brought out again in Venice itself, but in another theatre and under quite different circumstances. The composer made a few cuts in the score, substituted those changes in costume which have always been followed since, and thus reproduced his work at the Theatre San Benedetto, with Signora Spezia (since become Madame Aldighieri) in the character of Violetta, the tenor Landi, and I think the baryton Coletti, in the two other parts. The two latter were excellent, and as to Signora Spezia, pathetic to the last degree, she drew, it is said, tears from all eyes in this touching part.

Under these new conditions, *La Traviata* obtained a brilliant success, and soon made, in a triumphal manner, the tour of Italy and of the whole of Europe. We know what its success has been up to the present day.

À propos of *La Traviata*, I do not think it

[1] This is still more evident from the following fact:—The failure of *La Traviata* appeared so irremediable, that one of the interpreters of the work, the baryton Varesi, who had played the part of Germond, thought it necessary at the end of the performance to convey his condolences to Verdi. "Make them," replied the latter drily, "to yourself and your companions, who have not understood my music!"

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without interest to reproduce here the reflections which an Italian critic of great sense, Dr. Basevi, whom I have already quoted, has made on this work. He speaks in this manner :—

"*La Traviata* is a composition which, by the quality of the characters, by the nature of its sentiments, by the want of spectacle, bears resemblance to a comedy. Verdi has discovered a third manner, which in several points resembles the French style of the Opéra Comique.[1] This style of music, although it has not been tried on the stage in Italy, is, however, not unknown in private circles. In these latter years, we have seen Luigi Gordigiani and Fabio Campana making themselves known principally in this style of music, called *da camera*. Verdi, with his *Traviata*, has transported this chamber music on to the stage, and with happy success, to which the subject he has chosen well lends itself. We meet with more simplicity in this work than in the others of the same composer, especially as regards the orchestra, where the quartet of stringed instruments is almost always predominant; the *parlanti* occupy a great part of the score; we

[1] This does not appear to me absolutely correct, and I see in it no trace of a third manner, for the composer has never resumed nor employed it subsequently. *La Traviata* to me seems rather an exception, a chance—a happy chance—in the career of the master.

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meet with several of those airs which repeat under the form of verses; and, finally, the principal vocal subjects are for the most part developed in short binary and tertiary movements, and have not, in general, the extension which the Italian style demands.

"Beyond this, Verdi has infused into this music a large amount of passion, but without that exaggeration which one still meets from time to time in his second manner; thus he has never succeeded so completely as in this opera in the unaffected expression of love. But the love thus expressed by Verdi is voluptuous, sensual, completely wanting in that angelic purity which is found in the music of Bellini. The latter always preserves that character of innocence, that candour which fills the mind with sweetness, even when it is bestowed on a character who is nothing less than chaste. The difference of love according to Bellini and according to Verdi has made its mark on their music, a witness of the different modes of thought at the times when these two masters lived. But although the character of the *lorette* may not be as yet perfectly naturalised in Italy (and it is to be hoped that it never will be), Verdi has not depicted it without some slight modification, Italianising it a little, and thus making it less hateful.

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"If Bellini has depicted in Norma a guilty woman, he has represented her at a moment when she is so blinded by passion that she cannot see the enormity of her crime. Besides, the crime of Norma offends us so much the less from the fact that, by the remoteness of the time and the difference of costume, it is more difficult for us to put our conscience in unison with that of the character. It is not the same in *La Traviata*, in which we find ourselves in the presence of personages who not only are near to us in time and manners, but also in their surroundings."[1]

I do not think that this parallel between Bellini and Verdi has been elsewhere attempted. It is for that reason that it seemed to me interesting to reproduce it here.

To come to an end with *La Traviata*, I will refer to the fact that this work was sung for the first time in Paris, at our Théâtre Italien, on the 6th December, 1856, with Signora Piccolomini, Mario, and Graziani for principal interpreters, and that the French translation of it (due to Edouard Duprez) was given at the Théâtre Lyrique on the 27th October, 1864, under the title of *Violetta*. It served for the brilliant *début* of Mademoiselle Christine Nilsson, who at once infatuated the Parisians, and the two male

[1] Abramo Basevi: *Studio sulle Opere di Giuseppe Verdi.*

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parts were played by MM. Montjauze and Lutz.[1]

[1] A few days before its appearance on our Italian stage, *La Traviata* had been given, on the 1st November, at the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg, where it was sung by the charming Madame Bosio, and by MM. Calzolari and Bartolini. The success which it there obtained was a repetition of that which it had at last met with in Italy, and it was reproduced there with a sort of madness, which drew from Scudo, disenchanted, these bitter words:—"They keep on saying every day that Italy is sick; her fall is deeper even than she thinks, and we desire no other proof than the prodigious success which, on the other side of the Alps, such works as *La Traviata* receive." As to Mademoiselle Piccolomini, who with us made a perfect triumph in this work, the curious details which one of our journals at that time gave about her will not be read without interest. "Mademoiselle Maria Piccolomini made her *début* in the principal part. Must we here unroll the list, so often published, of all the grandeurs which surrounded the cradle of the young artiste? Must we recall that her family, which traces back to great officers of Charlemagne, which for centuries gave sovereigns to Sienna, counts among its members Pope Pius II., illustrious captains celebrated by Schiller, and that it still possesses at the present day a cardinal of whom the young Maria is own niece? So many ancestors, so many obstacles to a theatrical calling; but true genius triumphs over everything which shackles it, and doubles its strength in generous strife. Thus worked the genius of the young Maria, who, at the age of fifteen years, sang in a charity concert at the theatre of Sienna, and who two years later made her *début* at La Pergola in Florence as Lucrezia Borgia. Was it not a strange thing, quite a little girl posing as the illustrious poisoner, a woman who had already married her fourth husband? The public applauded, and they were bound to applaud to excess, if only for the remarkable nature of the occurrence. Since then Maria Piccolomini has appeared at several theatres—at Rome, at Pisa, at Reggio, at Palermo, at Udine, at Bologna; but it was at Turin in 1855 that her renown made a sudden explosion after her appearance in *La Traviata*." Since then Mademoiselle Piccolomini, having become Marchesa Gaetani, has renounced scenic triumphs.

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CHAPTER IX.

First work written by Verdi expressly for the French stage.—The Opera. —*Les Vêpres Siciliennes.*—Sophie Cruvelli.—Fickle behaviour of a great singer.—Her flight, which became an affair of state.—Representation of *Les Vêpres.*—Its half-success.—Fifth opera of Verdi at Venice.—*Simon Boccanegra.*—It is received with reserve. —*Stiffelio* transformed into *Aroldo*, and represented at Rimini, with no greater success.—*Un Ballo in Maschera.*—Politics and the theatre.—Verdi and the director-general of the royal theatres of Naples.—The new opera not being permitted in that city, is transported to Rome.—New difficulties.—Alterations imposed by the censure.—A king has no right to be assassinated on the stage. —*Un Ballo in Maschera* is at last performed.—Its success.—*La Forza del Destino* at St. Petersburg.—It obtains but a courteous reception.

AFTER *La Traviata*, Verdi kept silence for four years. But at that time he was engaged upon the first work which he wrote expressly for our Opera. Every one knows that, from a musical point of view, France has always offered the widest hospitality to strangers, pushing this virtue even to excess, and exercising it at the expense of her most noble sons. It is thus that, getting up a Universal Exhibition for 1855, and desirous that our grand lyric stage should offer on that occasion to the visitors drawn to Paris from all parts of Europe the first-fruits of

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a new work, she was careful not to have recourse to one of her own musicians—to Auber, to Halévy, or to Berlioz—but gave a commission for the work to Verdi. I state the fact, without insisting farther upon it.

But what was still more strange, it must be admitted, was the choice of the subject confided to the attention of the composer. In fact, nothing better could be found to offer to an Italian musician writing for France than a libretto bearing this title, *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, recalling one of the bloodiest episodes of the ancient wars between France and Italy.

The libretto was in five acts, and had for authors Scribe and Duveyrier. About the month of May or June, 1854, Verdi arrived in Paris to put himself in communication with his *collaborateurs*, and at once took up his abode in a country house in the environs, to devote himself to work without interruption, far from the noise and feverish activity of the capital. About the middle of September, the composer handed over the principal pieces of his work; it was arranged then that it should be put in study on the 1st October, and it was hoped that the work might be ready to be produced during or towards the end of the month of January. But they had reckoned without allowing for the traditional delays of the Opera, and especially

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for a strange, almost scandalous, circumstance, which made a great noise, and for several weeks kept Paris in excitement. "*La donna è mobile*" was put into the mouth of the Duke of Mantua by Verdi in his *Rigoletto;* he experienced it himself more than any one on this occasion.

The great artist named Sophie Cruvelli, who at our Théâtre Italien, in *Luisa Miller*, had made her mark by her sumptuous beauty, her prodigious voice, and her remarkable talent, had made on the same stage, in *Ernani*, one of those dazzling successes which set the seal to a reputation. This success was so great, that the Direction of the Opera was quite carried away, and sought to attach the young singer to its ranks; at a time when the salaries of singers had not as yet become what they are at the present day, it made her, one may truly say, a bridge of gold which she did not hesitate to cross, consenting, without much trouble, to accept the hundred thousand francs per annum (£4,000) which the administration of our first lyric stage liberally granted her. Mademoiselle Cruvelli had consequently made her first appearance in the month of January, 1854, in the *Huguenots*, and this *début*, which had made a sensation among the *dilettanti* of Paris, was a perfect triumph for the artist. Thus, when he arrived here, Verdi found

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again at the Opera the singer who at the Théâtre Italien had been his ardent and inspired interpreter, and, in agreement with Scribe, he decided to write for her the principal part in the work he was preparing.

Everything seemed in a fair way: the poem of *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* was completed; the composer, as we have seen, had handed over to the copyist the most important pieces of his score; the distribution of the work had been definitely settled; according to arrangements, the preparation had been put in hand on the 1st October, when, at the end of eight days, an event occurred, which assuredly no one could have foreseen, which stopped everything. On Monday, the 9th October, the bills of the Opera advertised the *Huguenots*, and the name of Mademoiselle Cruvelli, announced to play the part of Valentine, gave the promise of large receipts. The concourse was indeed great, and at an early hour the doors of the theatre were besieged by a constantly increasing crowd; still, although the hour of opening arrived, the box offices remained obstinately shut, and the spectators, astonished at a delay the cause of which they could not explain, began to express their impatience and discontent. They kept their places, however, till at last appeared an *employé*, who set to work to stick on each

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bill a slip of paper, by which the administration gave notice to the public that Mademoiselle Cruvelli having, in disregard of all her obligations, suddenly left Paris without any notice, it found itself unable to give the performance announced.

The general disappointment may be guessed. But it would be difficult to imagine what was the effect produced the next day in Parisian society by the flight of an artist whom, since her first appearance, it had made much of, caressed, flattered, spoiled in all sorts of ways. Moreover, it must be remarked that for some months past an imperial decree had included the Opera in the privileges of the civil list of the household of the Emperor; the theatre was consequently administered at the charges of the State, so that the fugitive seemed in some sort to have been wanting in respect to the sovereign in person. It is perfectly true to say that it was treated as an affair of State, that diplomacy mixed itself up in it, and that for a whole month it was a subject of gossip for Paris, and even for foreign parts. But with all their skill, with the most careful search, it was impossible to discover the retreat of Mademoiselle Cruvelli. A fortnight after the event it was still unknown, a fact which suggested the news thus given by *La France Musicale*:—"It is still unknown

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what has become of Mademoiselle Cruvelli. Her unexpected flight renders impossible for the present the performance of the opera of MM. Scribe and Verdi, which was put in rehearsal the 1st of this month. In this situation, M. Verdi has declared officially to the administration that he will withdraw his score."[1] On the other hand, the *Gazette Musicale* announced in these terms the measures which it had been thought proper to take to protect the interests of the administration of the Opera :—" Nothing positive is known as yet as to the causes of the hasty departure of Mademoiselle Cruvelli. It seems, however, probable that the celebrated singer betook herself to Germany, near to her family.[2] Since Friday of last week, in the name of the minister of the household of the Emperor, M. Blot, advocate, presented a request to the President of the Civil Tribunal for the purpose of obtaining an authorisation to make a provisional seizure of the furniture of the apartment occupied by Mademoiselle Cruvelli, Rue Trouchet, No. 15, as a guarantee of a sum of one hundred thousand francs (£4,000), at which amount is provisionally valued the damage caused by the breach of the duly contracted engagement. Another motion has also been

[1] *La France Musicale* of October 22nd, 1854.

[2] Mademoiselle Crüwell, called *Cruvelli*, was German by birth and origin.

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presented to obtain an authorisation to serve an attachment upon M. de Rothschild, the holder of funds or valuables belonging to Mademoiselle Cruvelli. M. le Président has at once made two orders authorising these precautionary measures. Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli has left her apartment in the greatest order, and nothing has been removed by her from her wardrobe, in which even her theatrical costumes were found."[1]

Days slipped away, however, and they succeeded in finding no traces of the fugitive, on which *La France Musicale* published, under the title "A Flight," the following violent article :—

"A few words more on Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli. Her sudden departure, her sudden disappearance rather, has served for some days past for the talk of theatres and drawing-rooms. Why did she go? What has become of her? Some think her in America, others in St. Petersburg, others in Frankfort. She has left the Opera to marry a count, a prince;[2] with what do they not credit an artist who has failed

[1] *Gazette Musicale* of October 22nd, 1854.

[2] The same day the *Gazette Musicale* published the following news :—"The Brussels newspapers announce the news of the approaching marriage of Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli to M. Georges Vigier, second son of Count Vigier." It is well known, in fact, that Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli became subsequently Baroness Vigier. From that time she renounced altogether a theatrical career.

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in all her duties, broken her engagements, and has not feared to make herself the subject of a great public scandal! We admired the talent of Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli; on more than one occasion we have testified our admiration; but to-day her conduct entirely estranges our sympathies. Above talent is honour, of which no one has the right to make himself publicly the plaything. To go off in this way, leaving the stage where you are admired, where you are applauded, in inextricable confusion, to go off furtively as a trader who wanted to betray the confidence of his creditors, is an act without precedent at the French Opera, and which cannot be too much deplored.

"Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli, they say, is apt to be headstrong. At Milan, at Genoa, in London, she has had differences with the *impresarii* which have exposed the lightness of her character. Sins of this nature are familiar to her. If she has a touch of madness, let her be taken care of once for all; by means of douche baths she may be brought round. But if, on the contrary, it is with deliberation she gives herself up to these culpable escapades, let her be brought to reason, and let her be made to atone severely for her inexplicable conduct.

"Here is a theatre which reckoned on her, which paid her more handsomely than any

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artist had ever been paid; here is a musician, Verdi, honour and probity itself, who leaves the country of his triumphs, Italy, for the express purpose of coming to consecrate to the singer more than six months of his time and the finest inspirations he is capable of; here is a poet, M. Scribe, who sketches out a splendid part for this lady, whose name had become a talisman for our French theatre. What ingratitude! She has forgotten all this; and unreasonably breaking off all her friendships, ignoring all that has been done for her, for her fame, for her fortune, she goes off, taking with her the hopes of the poet and the musician.

"Where will she be able to sing now without being pursued by the hisses of every one who is acquainted with this unheard-of conduct? If remorse can penetrate into the recesses of her heart, let Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli come to her senses, let her cast a look into the future; perhaps she will feel a blush mounting to her face, and will return of her own accord to the fold. We wish it for herself; we wish it for art; we wish it for ourselves, we who first of all brought her on the stage of the Théâtre Italien, four years ago, and who have not ceased since to follow her with evident interest in her progress and in her triumphs." [1]

[1] *La France Musicale* of the 29th November, 1854.

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The truth is that they could not succeed in discovering Mademoiselle Cruvelli's hiding-place, but the singer, perhaps astonished, and above all alarmed at the uproar which her escapade had caused, at last gave news of herself. To prepare the mind of the public for her return, she began by having the following little paragraph inserted in the *Courrier de Strasbourg*, which proves sufficiently that her trip had had Germany for its destination: "Mademoiselle Cruvelli, the celebrated fugitive of the Grand Opera of Paris, was present last night at the performance at the Strasburg theatre, in the box of the Hotel de Paris. Mademoiselle Cruvelli is passing through our town, and returns to Paris."[1] Then, four days afterwards, a Paris journal, which was in very close bonds with the minister, published this other note, evidently inspired, in which was explained as well, or as badly, as possible—and rather badly than well—the conduct of the pretty rebel, but which indicated clearly that peace was made between her and the administration of the Opera—I was going to say between her and the Imperial Government:—"It is in consequence of an unfortunate misunderstanding that the absence of Mademoiselle Cruvelli caused the interruption of a performance of the Opera, the person

[1] *Courrier de Strasbourg* of the 3rd November, 1854.

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who was charged with informing the administration of her departure not having executed his commission. Mademoiselle Cruvelli, afraid of the disastrous effect which followed it, has not dared up to the present time to reappear before the public. Understanding at present how much the prolongation of her absence might aggravate her involuntary wrong-doing, she has asked and obtained authorisation to resume at once her duties at the Opera."[1]

We can picture to ourselves Mademoiselle Cruvelli leaving Paris quietly, just when she was announced to play in the evening at the Opera, not even taking the trouble to write a word to the proper authority, and taking no further trouble as to the consequences, simply telling some messenger to announce her depar-

[1] *La Patrie* of the 7th November, 1854:—"It is needless to say that the *habitués* of the Opera had formed a very severe judgment on the truly inexplicable conduct of Mademoiselle Cruvelli. They were furious, it was said, and prepared to give her a bad time of it on the night of her reappearance, threatening to hiss her without pity, and to read her a severe lesson. There was considerable apprehension about it; but chance, which is often witty, took on itself to appease an anger which, besides, was perhaps only on the surface. It was in the part of Valentine in the *Huguenots* that Mademoiselle Cruvelli reappeared, on the 20th November. Now it is known that at the first entry of Valentine, the Queen addresses her in these words, which found an application really astonishing under the circumstances:—'Dis-moi le résultat de ton hardi voyage'—'Tell me the result of your daring journey.' The *à propos* was so happy, and bore so well on the point, that the public, hearing these words, was seized with a fit of wild laughter, which seemed inextinguishable. It was disarmed."

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ture to the administration. All this is burlesque, and it must be avowed that the Government of Napoleon III., for a long time touchy in political affairs, which brought it to the pass we know of, became singularly accommodating in face of a question of art, and willingly allowed itself to be made a laughing-stock in the public eye.

However this may have been, as soon as Mademoiselle Cruvelli was back in Paris, the preparation of *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* was resumed with activity; Verdi directed the study in person, performing himself the duties of accompanist at the pianoforte. The other interpreters were Mademoiselle Sannier, MM. Gueymard, Boulo, Bonnehée, Obin, and Coulon. It took no less than seven months to put the work in a state to be offered to the public. We are assured that during all this time, the great singer, wishing to make the composer forgive the want of consideration towards him of which she had been specially guilty, manifested an assiduity, a zeal, and an ardour which nothing damped. The part, besides, suited marvellously her talent, full of fire and of somewhat unrestrained passion. The rumours which were rife outside the theatre as to the new opera gave the hope of a great success both for the composer and for the principal interpreter. It

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was in respect of this, and also of a recent reproduction of *Ernani* at the Théâtre Italien, that Adolphe Adam, in one of his *feuilletons* of *L'Assemblée Nationale*, published some very true and curious reflections on Verdi, on his successes in Italy, and on the difficulty with which the French public had become accustomed to his music, in despite of the renown which he had elsewhere acquired.

"Of all the operas of Verdi represented in Paris," said the writer, "*Ernani* is the one which has obtained the most success. I cannot say why; for I am quite as fond of the others, and I do not think that this success is to be attributed especially to the excellent execution it has received since the *début* of Mademoiselle Cruvelli. I am not one of her fanatical and blind admirers; but I admired her sincerely in this opera, where she was excellent in every detail. I was present at her first appearance, and I went to hear her three times in succession, which is pretty well for me; I have seen her in all her other parts, but to those I went less often. I hope that she will again show all those qualities which she then displayed in the new work which Verdi has just written for her, now in preparation at the Opera. I shall be delighted at the success which she obtains, both for Mademoiselle Cruvelli and for Verdi, for I

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should be sorry not to admire what so many others admire. One of my pupils, who has just come back from Italy, where he went to pass the necessary time as *pensionnaire* of the Institut, told me that we cannot form an idea of the enthusiasm which the music of Verdi raises. Rossini, even in his most brilliant period, did not excite a similar fanaticism. This is perhaps easier to explain than one thinks.

"The Italians in music practise in a small way the system of the Chinese with regard to strangers: they do not know, and they do not wish to know, anything but their own music. Some attempts have been made to place French operas on the Italian stage, and the Parisian newspapers have proclaimed the successes obtained by *La Muta di Portici*, *Roberto il Diavolo*, *Il Profeta*, etc., but these successes must have been much less decisive than was claimed for them, as they have been maintained nowhere. Therefore the Italians, familiar absolutely with their own music only, have naturally been less impressed with Rossini, who brought them but the continuation and the perfecting of that which they had been in the habit of hearing up to that time, than with Verdi, who gave something quite different. It was no longer elegance, brilliancy, wealth, and ease of melody, which was wanting to the public, for with that

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it was saturated; it was vigour, energy, and passion somewhat unrestrained. Verdi guessed this want to a marvel, and had happily the power and talent to satisfy it. It follows from this explanation, that the same character of success was impossible in France, where we were already familiarised with passionate and vigorous effects, and that at the Théâtre Italien it was less so than elsewhere, because this new school brought to it that which the public were not seeking, and excluded that which it wished to find. This slight sympathy of the public at the Théâtre Italien for the works of Verdi cannot in any respect diminish the value of this master, nor lessen the hopes which we have a right to found on the work which he has written for our stage. We find in the works of Verdi certain qualities which may appear secondary in the style properly called Italian, but which are predominant, and cannot fail of success on our stage. These qualities are power, 'go,' and breadth, and no one can overlook them in this composer, whose tendencies may be contested, but whose talent cannot be doubted."

We see with what frankness Adam does justice to the Italian master, and how clearly he is able to distinguish the causes which have delayed the success of his works in France.

This success, however, was distinctly de-

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clared with *Ernani*, *Rigoletto*, and *Il Trovatore*; it was even boisterously proclaimed at the Opera with the translation of the latter work. Were we about to see it break out with its full force in the first work written by Verdi expressly for France? To this question we are almost tempted to reply at the same time with "Yes" and "No." It is certain that the reception given to the *Vêpres Siciliennes* from its first appearance on our grand lyric stage was very warm — almost enthusiastic;[1] the very appreciable value of the score, its remarkable interpretation as regards *ensemble*, the presence of a singer who exercised on the public a sort of fascination, the richness and the luxury of the *mise en scène*, and above all the crowd which gathered in Paris on the occasion of the *Exposition Universelle*, all concurred in making this reception especially brilliant. On the other hand, it is incontestable, that when once the first curiosity was worn out, when once the conditions under which it had been offered to the public were changed, the success of the work was not sustained. As soon as Sophie Cruvelli, who shortly quitted the Opera, had ceased to take part in the performance, it could not keep its place in the *rêpertoire*. In the month of June, 1859, four months after

[1] The first performance took place on the 13th June, 1855.

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its production, it was resumed, with Madame Barbot in the part of the Duchess Hélène; this revival passed almost unnoticed. In 1863 the work was remounted anew, not without some ceremony. It was Mademoiselle Marie Sax, in all the splendour of her youth and fine talent, who then succeeded to Mademoiselle Cruvelli, whom she did not fail to call to mind in certain aspects, while Villaret, almost at the commencement of his career, took the place of Gueymard. The composer, at that time in Paris, had given his attention to this revival; he had even written for Villaret a romance, which he sang in a charming manner, and which replaced the air which the tenor originally sang at the beginning of the fourth act. It was to no purpose, and *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* was unable to recover the reputation of its early days. It shortly disappeared finally, having furnished, in the space of eight years, a total series of sixty-two performances.[1]

[1] The Italians in Paris had exercised some influence on the somewhat deceptive vogue of its early days. At that time, when their country was, from a political point of view, cut up into scraps, all the sons of this admirable country followed with anxious interest the works of their compatriots in foreign countries. Giving a report of the representation of *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, here is what Scudo, himself an Italian, wrote: —"Great curiosity attached to the production of this work, which might be the signal of a new transformation of dramatic music; the house at the Opera presented therefore on that day a remarkable spectacle; the partisans of the Italian composer had agreed to meet there *en masse*, and it is

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However, shortly after its first appearance at the Opera, *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, as might be expected, crossed the Alps and appeared in Italy. But as the censure (with which Verdi always got on badly, as administered in Venice or Milan, Naples or Florence) was very suspicious, it would not tolerate either the subject or the title of *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*. It was necessary, therefore, to adapt a new poem to the master's score, the main facts of which offered some analogy to that of the original libretto, and for that purpose the choice fell upon an episode in the history of Portugal in the seventeenth century, at the time when that

no exaggeration to say that nearly all the *dilettanti* of leisure from Milan, from Turin, and other towns of Lombardy, took part in this solemnity, which had for them the importance of a political event. In fact, questions of art are not for the Italians of to-day simple problems of taste, to be stated and discussed in the calm regions of intellect; the passions and the present interests of life are found mixed up with them, and in the success of a *virtuoso*, of an artist, or of a work, it matters not of what nature, the Italians see a success of nationality, one claim the more to the esteem of civilised Europe. . . . It is the eternal honour of Italy that after two civilisations so different as that of the Rome of Augustus and that of Leo X., it has had the power to survive the oppression which has weighed on it since the middle of the sixteenth century. It is by the arts, letters, and sciences, that this beautiful country has always protested against the miserable Governments which have endeavoured to stifle in it all moral activity. In this way is explained the excitability of Italians when they have to defend their poets, their artists, and their men of learning against the criticism of strangers. Questions of taste are for them questions of life and death, and to contest the glory of their celebrated men is to contest their nationality. This brings us back to M. Verdi and his opera *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*." . . .

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noble little country groaned under the yoke of the Spanish rule. The work, thus modified, took the name of *Giovanna di Guzman.* I believe that it never obtained much success in Italy, in the first place on account of the subject of the second libretto, and further on account of its length, French operas having, as we know, much larger proportions than Italian operas, in which French operas are quite in the wrong.

After *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, Verdi wrote a fifth work for the Fenice at Venice, which seems to have always been his favourite theatre. This time it was *Simon Boccanegra*, an opera in three acts and a prologue, of which Piave had furnished him the libretto. It was produced on the 12th March, 1857. Looked forward to with a curiosity rendered still more active by the great success which the performance of the last work of the master had received in Paris, *Simon Boccanegra* was only moderately fortunate in Venice. It is true that of the four principal artists who took part in the performance, two at least—the tenor Negrini and the baryton Giraldoni—hardly suited the parts for which they were cast, and that they were out of voice on the day of the performance. But, on the other hand, it appears that the poem of Piave was not of a nature to help

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greatly the success of the work. Signor Basevi, who speaks of this poem as a "monstrous melodramatic *pasticcio*," makes the following significant avowal about it:—"I have been constrained to read with attention not less than six times this libretto of Piave, in order to understand, or to think I understand, something about it." If an attentive perusal, six times repeated, produced such a result, or, to be more correct, such an absence of result, let us judge of the effect produced on the spectator by a work obscure to such a point.

In reality, *Simon Boccanegra* obtained but moderate success. It was more fortunate when, after the lapse of twenty years, the composer returned to his work, as he did with some of his others, and after having had the poem greatly modified, made important modifications in the score. Passing through Cologne in 1875, at the moment when an excellent company was there giving performances of Schiller's *Fieschi*, Verdi resolved to go and see this work, on which Piave had based the poem of *Simon Boccanegra*. Although he did not understand German, Verdi was struck with the power of Schiller's drama, with its pathetic and dramatic vigour, and exclaimed, "Ah, what a fine poem Piave might have made for me!" It was then that he thought of the revival of his opera, on

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the basis of a complete reconstruction of the libretto. This idea having once entered into his mind, did not leave him, and he was helped in its realisation by one of the young masters of the contemporary Italian school, Signor Arrigo Boito, composer of *Mefistofele*, who is equally distinguished as a poet and as a composer. Signor Boito set to work on Verdi's indications, completed it to his most entire satisfaction, and the composer, in addition to the numerous modifications of detail to which he submitted the music, wrote for this second edition of *Simon Boccanegra* several entirely new pieces, among others, in the first act, a finale which is one of the most dramatic and most original pieces which have fallen from his pen. Thus *rimpastato*, *Simon Boccanegra* reappeared in 1881 at La Scala in Milan, where a French artist, M. Maurel, filled the principal part. The work on this occasion was received with the greatest favour, and M. Maurel, having become for a short time, two years later, the restorer and the director of the Théâtre Italien in Paris, thought he could not do better than inaugurate his administration by the performance of an opera which had brought him considerable personal success in Italy. Nothing had been neglected, besides, to ensure the triumph of it. In addition to M. Maurel, the interpretation was con-

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fided to Madame Fidès Devriès, to MM. Nouvelli and Ed. de Reszké; and the splendid *chef d'orchestre* of La Scala itself, M. Franco Faccio, came to put himself at the head of the Parisian orchestra. Yet, in spite of all, *Simon Boccanegra* was received with extreme reserve when it thus made its appearance among us, on the 27th November, 1883. In short, and in spite of all the efforts of the master in its favour, it seems doubtful whether this work will ever be reckoned among the number of his best.[1]

After the quasi-failure which *Simon Boccanegra* had sustained in its first form, Verdi gave, at the Teatro Novo of Rimini, the second version of his *Stiffelio*, which had been somewhat unfortunate at Trieste in 1850. This he turned into *Aroldo*. It was necessary again, in consequence of the susceptibilities of the Italian censure, to completely alter the subject of it, and

[1] It was at the time when Verdi began to undertake the revision of his *Simon Boccanegra*, at the commencement of 1876, that his *collaborateur* Piave, who for a long time had been ill and unable to work, died. As I have said above, Verdi, in recognition of his services, and to prevent him from falling into distress, had from that time assigned him an annuity, which, as we may suppose, was always paid with the most absolute punctuality; but he did not stop there: he settled on the young daughter of the poet a capital sum, to be handed to her on her majority, with the accumulation of interest. Piave was thus enabled to die tranquilly, having wanted for nothing during his last days, and reassured as to the fate of his child. Such actions should not remain unknown.

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the priest Stiffelio, regarded as inoffensive at Trieste, at Rimini had to give place to a chief of barbarians. The piece was, therefore, entirely remodelled; certain parts of the score were cut out and replaced by new, others were modified, and, finally, a fourth act was added to the work, which originally consisted of three only. *Aroldo*, however, was not more fortunate on the 16th August, 1857, than was *Stiffelio* six years and a half earlier. It was sung on this occasion by Signora Lotti, and by Pancani, Ferri, Cornago, and Paggiali.

But in *Un Ballo in Maschera* the master was about to find again one of the most brilliant successes which have marked his career. It was not, however, without the annoyances which generally accompanied the production of his works, and we may say that its birth was surrounded by circumstances really remarkable. It was imitated from the *Gustave III.* of Scribe and Auber, represented not long previously at the Opera, and after having been intended to bear that title, it had received that of *La Vendetta in Domino*, which was at last transformed into *Un Ballo in Maschera*. It had been written for the San Carlo Theatre in Naples, and there began his tribulations, which, at first delaying its production, obliged him finally to take it elsewhere. The first news about it was

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given us by the *Gazette Musicale*:—"An action is at this moment entered between the direction of the royal theatres in Naples and the *maestro* Verdi; it will be decided by the Tribunal of Commerce. This is the matter in dispute. The celebrated composer was compelled to write for the San Carlo Theatre an opera having for title *Gustave III.*, a subject already treated by M. Scribe for the Grand Opera of Paris. The censure having required important modifications to be made in the libretto, Verdi has refused to submit to these requirements, and the opera has not been delivered to the direction, which claims an indemnity of forty thousand ducats. We are very curious to know the issue of this action."[1]

Here follows an exact account of the truly strange adventures of *Un Ballo in Maschera*:—

"Verdi had just arrived in Naples, in order to begin the rehearsals of that work, when, on the 13th January, 1858, the telegraph transmitted from Paris to that city the news of the attempt made by Felice Orsini against Napoleon III. on leaving the Opera, from which the latter had escaped as by miracle. On receipt of this news, the foreign police at once redoubled their strictness, and of course the censure in each country became more severe and more

[1] *Gazette Musicale* of the 4th April, 1858.

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timorous. That at Naples began by withdrawing the authorisation which it had granted for the representation of *Un Ballo in Maschera* at San Carlo, the assassination of Gustavus III. being at that time an unfortunate example to offer to spectators. In vain the direction, aided by the Duke of Ventignano, superintendent of the royal theatres, attempted to induce Verdi to consent to adapt his music to another libretto; Verdi showed himself absolutely intractable on the point. The superintendent, whose graceful and original proceedings I have already had occasion to speak of *à propos* of *Luisa Miller*, then sent him, by an officer of the court, a protest, to which he joined a demand for two hundred thousand francs as damages. It was of no use.

"But the noble Duke was knocking his head against a wall. Verdi remained inexorable and, as it was the period of the great liberal aspirations of Italy, it happened that the entire town of Naples openly took part with him. They approved his resistance, and desired, with him, that the work should be represented with the original libretto. There was not a person, including even the brother of the King, the Count of Syracuse (who, moreover, two years later cast in his lot with the kingdom of Italy, and embarked on a Piedmontese frigate), who

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was not seen to take an interest in this question, which agitated all minds. The Count was anxious to present Verdi to Ferdinand II., who would without any doubt, he assured him, be persuaded to allow the representation of his opera. Verdi refused absolutely.

"Still the agitation increased every day. Verdi could no longer leave his hotel without being followed by an immense crowd, which cheered and made the air resound with cries of "Viva Verdi!" which, beyond their special signification at this moment, had also, as we shall see later, a political meaning. To put a stop to this ebullition, which was, perhaps, not without danger, the Government decided at last to release Verdi from his obligations, and to let him depart with his opera. It only imposed as a condition that he should produce another in its place as soon as possible.

The situation had just been unravelled in this way, when Verdi received a visit from the director of the Apollo Theatre in Rome, the *impresario* Jacovacci, for a long time famous in Italy. Hardly had he got into Verdi's apartment, when he said to him :—

"*Maestro*, I understand that the Government here will not allow your *Ballo in Maschera* to be played. Will you let me have it for Rome?"

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Verdi began to laugh.

"My dear Jacovacci," said he, "how the deuce do you suppose that they will authorise at Rome what they refuse at Naples?"

"That's my affair," replied the *impresario*. "Let me only have the libretto, and promise me that, if in a week I have the authorisation, the work is mine, and that you will come to Rome to put it on the stage."

"But there is another difficulty," replied Verdi: "I make a condition, *sine quâ non*, that you engage Fraschini."

"Is that all?" said Jacovacci, smiling. "Then come this way a moment," said he, turning towards Fraschini, who was taking part in the interview.

They both went into an adjoining room, from whence they returned at the end of a few minutes, quite agreed on their conditions.

"Now," said Jacovacci, "I make the best of my way to Rome. I shall arrange with the censure, with the cardinal-governor, with St. Peter if necessary. Within a week, my dear *maestro*, you shall have the libretto, with all the *visas* and all the *buono per la scena* possible."

And he went.

However, matters did not go on quite as easily as he made out, and at Rome new difficulties presented themselves. The pontifical

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censure, very ticklish by nature, and also profoundly conservative of monarchical traditions and feelings, could not bring itself to decide on admitting what history had been compelled to put on record—namely, the assassination of a sovereign by one of his subjects. It was needful therefore on this occasion, under pain of not being able to present his work before the public, that the composer should resign himself to see it modified in its first representation. It was therefore agreed, that instead of taking place in Sweden, the action should pass in America, and that in the place of the murder of Gustavus III. they should be content to offer to the notice of the public that of the Earl of Warwick, governor of the town of Boston! Thanks to this change in the place of the action, to this alteration in regard to the rank and condition of the principal character, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, after some pulling about, could actually be produced. Happily, the follies which the requirements of the censure had accumulated in the libretto did no harm to the work, as to the success of which there was not a moment's doubt when it was at last put on the stage, on the 17th February, 1859.[1]

[1] It is known that the "American" version of *Un Ballo in Maschera* has not been preserved; but the subject has never been restored to its primitive state. The scene now passes in Naples, and if we are to believe Scudo, it was on the occasion

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In spite of the warm reception which the work met with from the public, the composer was far from being satisfied with its interpretation, which, if it was remarkable as far as regards the two principal men's parts, entrusted to Fraschini and Giraldoni, left much to be desired on the part of the feminine element, represented by Mesdames Julienne Dejean, Scotti, and Sbriscia. As he was complaining, not without bitterness, to Jacovacci, the latter, who was a cunning rogue, knowing all the tricks of his calling, replied, with a smile: "Bah! bah! Next season I shall have three better singers, the public will find the work still more to its taste, and I shall make still more money."[1]

Un Ballo in Maschera remains up to this time the last work written by Verdi for his own country; for since 1859, that is to say for

of the production of the work at our Théâtre Italien (on January 13th, 1861) that this new and final transformation was made:— "At the Théâtre Italien at Paris, the scene of *Un Ballo in Maschera* passes in the kingdom of Naples. M. Mario, though desiring to abdicate the throne of youth which he has so long occupied, absolutely refused to appear in the Puritan costume as worn in Boston at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This is what becomes of historical truth in the hands of censors, of librettists, and Italian *virtuosi!*" (*L'Année Musicale*, vol. iii., pp. 111, 112).

[1] *Un Ballo in Maschera*, translated into French by M. Edouard Duprez, under its exact title, *Le Bal Masqué*, was performed at our Théâtre Lyrique on the 17th November, 1869. The principal parts were played by MM. Massy and Lutz, by Madame Meillet and Mademoiselle Daram.

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twenty-six years, he has brought out but three operas, all three composed for foreign theatres.

Let us go on regularly.

In 1834 there lived at Tours, giving drawing lessons for a livelihood, a noble Spaniard, Don Angel de Saavedra, whom the revolutions so frequent in his country had forced into exile, in spite of a previous life full of nobility and courage. The Governments of Rome and of Tuscany had forbidden him access to their territory, and that of Charles X., without driving him from France, had at least forbidden him to stay in Paris. Don Angel de Saavedra had, therefore, chosen Orleans as his place of residence, and he had there founded a school of drawing, which, a few years after, he transferred to Tours. A general amnesty at last reopened to him the gates of his country, almost at the same time that the death of his eldest brother, by making him the heir of a great fortune and of the title of Duke de Rivas, elevated him to the dignity of grandee of Spain and peer of the realm.

The new Duke de Rivas was not only a politician and a brave soldier; he was also a pleasing man of letters, who had made himself known by works of interest, and by poetry worthy of notice. He took back to his own country several works written to sweeten the

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troubles of exile, among others a drama in five acts, partly in prose, partly in verse, overcharged with the exaggerations which at that time distinguished the French romantic school. This drama, entitled, I think, *Don Alvar*, was performed at Madrid on the 22nd March, 1835, and its appearance was quite a literary event. The success was colossal, and spread soon over the whole of Spain.

It is from this drama that, five-and-twenty years later, the librettist Piave drew a subject for Verdi, from whom the Court of Russia had ordered a new work for the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg. The work was in four acts, and under the title of *La Forza del Destino*, it was offered to the Muscovite public on the 10th November, 1862.[1] The interpreters were Tamberlik, Graziani, Debassini, Angelini, and Mesdames Barbot and Nantier-Didiée, that is to say four Italian men-singers and two French *cantatrices*, all artists of the first order. In spite of this remarkable interpretation, *La Forza del Destino* obtained in St. Petersburg no more than a cordial reception, which did not assume in any way the proportions of a success. The subject, we must say, was too sad, too sombre, too

[1] Its appearance had been delayed for a year by the illness of one of the artists who were to take part in its execution, Madame Barbot, which obliged Verdi to make two journeys to Russia.

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melancholy, and this melodramatic opera, in which the three principal characters perish simultaneously, of a violent death, one in a duel, the other assassinated, the third by suicide, appeared to the audience a little too deep in colour. The work was better received at La Scala in Milan, when it appeared there in 1869, after they had taken the precaution to have the poem touched up by M. Ghislanzoni. But it was received very coldly at our Théâtre Italien when it was heard there in 1876, sung by Mesdemoiselles Borghi-Mamo and Reggiani, by MM. Aramburo, Pandolfini, and Nannetti. In reality its value is secondary, and it has never excited more than moderate sympathy.[1]

It is between the performance of *La Forza del Destino* and that of *Don Carlos*, of which I shall have soon to speak, that a circumstance happened which ought to be mentioned: the

[1] It was, however, seriously proposed to have *La Forza del Destino* translated for performance at our Opera. This was in 1865, and here is what the *Gazette Musicale* (of the 31st December) said on the subject:—

"In consideration of the uncertainty which reigned as to the result of the negotiations entered into between the direction of the Opera and Verdi, we thought it best to be silent. To-day we are able to announce that an agreement has been signed between M. Emile Perrin and the celebrated composer. The result is that the project of representing *La Forza del Destino* is completely abandoned. M. Verdi will write expressly for the Opera a new score to a poem, in five acts, of MM. du Locle and Méry, which is taken from the tragedy of Schiller, *Don Carlos*. It will be put into rehearsal during July, to be performed in November next."

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election of Verdi as a foreign member of our Académie des Beaux Arts; this took place on the 25th June, 1864. The *Gazette Musicale* announced it thus in its number of the 3rd July:—"Saturday last the Académie des Beaux Arts proceeded to the election of a foreign member, in the place of Meyerbeer. Thirty-seven members were present. The absolute majority was nineteen votes. M. Verdi, composer, residing at Genoa, was elected by twenty-three votes; M. Simonis, sculptor, obtained seven votes; M. Navez, painter, four votes; M. Gallait, painter, two votes; and M. Geefs, sculptor, one vote."

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CHAPTER X.

Political career of Verdi.—A symbolical and revolutionary name.—*Viva V. E. R. D. I.!*—A musician and a minister: Verdi and Cavour.—Verdi deputy of Parma, afterwards senator of the kingdom of Italy.—An indifferent legislator.—*L'Inno delle Nazioni* in London.—Musical internationalism.

BEFORE going farther, I must say a few words as to the *political* career of Verdi. Let the reader, however, not be alarmed. I have no intention of treating at length on the subject, and if I mention it at all, it is that I may not neglect anything from the point of view which I have adopted in undertaking this work.

In 1859 and 1860, during the whole course of that war of Italian independence which began, by the help of the French forces, with the freedom of Lombardy, and which was followed by that of Tuscany, of the duchies and of the kingdom of Naples, the name of the great artist found itself "constructed" in a way that served as a symbol and a rallying-cry to the populations who wished to free themselves from the despotism of centuries, and to work together for the unity of their common country. Whatever

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shackles may be imposed upon freedom, oppressed nations always find ingenious means to render their intention understood. The Italians, in these circumstances, found no better means than to make use of the name of one of their own countrymen, a musician who, for the last fifteen years, reigned as a master in all the theatres of the peninsula, and whose celebrity was universal. Making use of this name to form a sort of rebus, the key of which, moreover, was easy to discover, they covered all the walls with this laconic inscription, which gave an impulse to their desires and their hopes:

Viva V. E. R. D. I. !

which meant in good Italian:

"Viva Vittorio-Emmanuele, Re D'Italia!"

In this way the fellow-countrymen of the great musician expressed themselves, so that wherever the mysterious inscription appeared, it was easy to understand their sentiments.

But that is not all. When the duchy of Parma wished to annex itself to the new kingdom of Italy, and it constituted its first Assembly, Verdi was elected deputy to that Assembly by the district of Busseto. They were not ignorant in his country that the great artist, a high-minded and liberal soul, had care-

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fully avoided all relations with the Austrians, and had even never been to the court of Parma, holding no intercourse with the Duke, and keeping himself apart as much from the former as from the latter. For this reason, as well as on account of the glory attaching to his name, his fellow-countrymen had chosen him for their representative.

But yet, this first occasion having gone by, as soon as the Assembly of Parma had voted the annexation of the duchy to Piedmont, Verdi found himself somewhat constrained by the new situation thrust upon him. He had an understanding with Cavour, who, on the occasion of the election of the first national Italian parliament, had begged him to come and see him, and had urged him very strongly to join its ranks.

"But, my dear Cavour," said the master to him, "you know well that I am no politician. I hate to find myself prominent, all I want is to work quietly in retirement, and I confess that your wishes are just a little irksome to me."

"I am quite aware that you are not a politician," replied the minister, "and I do not wish in any way to oblige you to become one. But I want to see united in our first national parliament all those men who have made a name in Italy by their intelligence, whether in the arts,

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in letters, or in science. That is why my earnest desire is that you form part of it."

To such an honourable entreaty Verdi yielded. It is unnecessary to say that he was nominated. But, having performed this act of citizenship, having taken part in the first labours of the Chamber of Deputies, he ended by staying away, and finally, at the end of two or three months, sent in his resignation.

This did not prevent King Victor Emmanuel in 1875 appointing him senator of the kingdom. But certainly politics frightened him, and nothing could overcome his disinclination. After his nomination, he made a formal appearance at the Senate and took the customary oath (on November 22nd). But this was all that he could bring himself to do, and since then I do not think that he has ever taken his seat.[1]

Must we count among the number of the rare political acts of the master the cantata which he wrote expressly for the inauguration of the Universal Exhibition of London in 1862? Perhaps this would be going too far. At all events, we must mention that important composition.

[1] This is the place to record that some years since an Italian *impresario*, the director of the theatre Piccini at Bari, for whom no doubt the artistic reputation of Verdi did not suffice, thought it fitting in announcing a performance of *Aïda* to inform the public that the work was by Maestro Senatore Verdi!

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It is known that four great artists had been commissioned to represent their country musically on this occasion: Auber for France, Meyerbeer for Germany, Verdi for Italy, and Sterndale Bennett for England. Verdi (who, we may remark, is the last remaining alive of the four) wrote on this occasion an *Inno delle Nazioni*, the performance of which could not take place in the Exhibition building itself, but which was given on the 24th May at Her Majesty's Theatre. This hymn comprised an introduction, a chorus, a soprano solo sung by Mademoiselle Titiens, and a finale of large dimensions, in which, no doubt to justify the title of the work, came shoulder to shoulder, and jostled each other, in a carefully developed *ensemble*, the three subjects of "God save the Queen," the Marseillaise, and the Italian national hymn. This may be called musical internationalism.[1]

[1] We are assured that it was in consequence of the ill-will and jealousy of the celebrated *chef d'orchestre* Michael Costa, now deceased, that Verdi's hymn was performed neither at the Exhibition nor at Covent Garden Theatre, where the solo was to be sung by the famous tenor Tamberlik. The newspaper *Le Nord*, in its English correspondence, spoke of the performance at Her Majesty's Theatre in the following terms:—"After the end of the season, the Italian Theatre has opened its doors once more for a benefit performance. As usual in such performances, the programme was an *olla podrida*, all the ingredients of which were familiar with the exception of an unpublished piece by Verdi, *L'Inno delle Nazioni*, composed for the inauguration of the last Universal

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Exhibition in London. We have already become acquainted with the pieces of Meyerbeer and Auber written for the same ceremony. We have been anxious to hear the present work. The first part is composed of dramatic recitatives and of a *cantabile* in the familiar style of the *maestro*. The second is an arrangement of several national airs. The sonorousness had been designed for a large area, such as that of the Crystal Palace. In a theatre, the brass nearly makes one's ears bleed. In addition, the patriotic *maestro* has conceived the idea of crossing and intertwining different *motivi* one with the other: the complex genius of the contrapuntist Meyerbeer even does not always get through such a work satisfactorily; Verdi does not appear to me made for such an attempt. Besides, there is not the least *entente cordiale* between the Marseillaise and 'God save the Queen.' Have you ever found yourself at a review between two or three military bands playing different airs? That is the effect of the finale of the *Inno delle Nazioni*, or something very like it."

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CHAPTER XI.

Don Carlos, the second French opera of Verdi.—Verdi and Dantan. Bust of the Italian composer by the French sculptor.—A new opera in Egypt.—*Aida*.—History of this masterpiece.—Mariette Bey.—M. Camille du Locle.—M. Ghislanzoni.—Cairo, Milan, and Paris.—A letter of Verdi.—Triumph of the new work.—A novel claim and a kindly composer.

We now come to Verdi's second French work. It was twelve years since the first (*Les Vêpres Siciliennes*) had made its appearance, when the performance of *Don Carlos*, the libretto of which had been written by Méry and M. Camille du Locle, took place at the Opera on the 11th March, 1867. On this occasion again I am bound to observe, that being in want, as in 1853, of a new work for the season of a Universal Exhibition, the administration of our first lyric stage felt bound to give the commission to a foreigner.

Since the month of April, 1866, the state of affairs at the Opera had again changed. Abandoning the system of management at the charge of the civil list, they had reverted to the administration of a responsible director, entrusted with the undertaking at his own risk and peril, in

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return for the advantage of a considerable subvention. The director at that time was no other than M. Emile Perrin, who had been the administrator in charge for the last four years. M. Perrin was therefore at the head of the Opera when Verdi, somewhat out of health, arrived in Paris to organise and direct the preparation of *Don Carlos*, about the middle of August, 1866.[1] It was hoped that the work might be given before the end of the year, but . . . but every one knows what the Opera is, and what a heavy machine it is to set in motion when there is a question of producing a new work.

Delay after delay, hindrance after hindrance, difficulty after difficulty, the year slipped away, and the following year began. On the 15th January, 1867, Verdi received by telegraph the news of the unexpected death of his father, and this naturally did not accelerate the progress of the work, which he superintended with his usual care. Before this, legal proceedings had taken place between the direction of the Opera and one of the artists,

[1] "Verdi himself went through his part with each of the interpreters of the new opera. The general rehearsals began the following week. Verdi, who has suffered for some years with an affection of the throat, left last Saturday for Cauterets, where he will remain till September. He will then return to Paris to resume the rehearsals of *Don Carlos*" (*Gazette Musicale* of the 26th August, 1866).

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the bass Belval, who, intended by Verdi to play one of the parts in *Don Carlos*, had refused to undertake it, finding it too unimportant for him. In short, they finished by reaching the month of March, and it was only on the 11th of that month that the work appeared, having for principal interpreters Mesdames Marie Sass and Gueymard and MM. Faure, Morère, Obin, and David.[1]

The first performance, surrounded by all the brilliancy which Paris succeeds in giving to such ceremonies, took place with great state, in the presence of the Imperial family and of a crowd of illustrious persons, of notabilities of all sorts, belonging to the world of politics, letters, and arts. The success, however, was not such as had been hoped, and the work, judged in different manners, was actively discussed, not without some roughness, by the press and by the public. But Verdi, grieving at the death of his father, fatigued by the long and busy stay which he had made in Paris,—moreover, continuing to be rather out of health, did not wait for the discussion to be settled; two days after the first

[1] The first rehearsal with the double quartet had taken place about the 20th January; the 27th and the 29th the first orchestral rehearsals were held; the 10th February they proceeded to the full general rehearsal; the 24th it was rehearsed for the first time with scenery, without costume; finally, the 9th March the complete general rehearsal was held.

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performance, having himself arranged the "cuts" which were acknowledged to be necessary[1]—and he refused, it is said, an agreement which had been offered to him by the director of the Opera to engage to write the inaugural work for the new house which was being constructed on the Boulevard des Capucines—he left Paris and started for Genoa, where he went to settle in a superb palace, the Palazzo Doria, which he had recently bought. During this time, *Don Carlos* (which with us only achieved the number of forty-three representations) was put in rehearsal at Covent Garden Theatre in London, where it also received a superb interpretation, being entrusted to Mesdames Pauline Lucca and Fricci, then in all the splendour of their youth and their talent, and to MM. Naudin, Graziani, Bagagiolo, and Petit. The work does not appear to have been much more fortunate in London, where it was brought out on the 4th June, than in Paris. It was only in the country of the composer that it entered upon a more fortunate career, and Bologna, the first town in Italy which put it on the stage, received it with a real success. Since then it

[1] "Several important cuts, authorised by Verdi, have been made at the second performance of *Don Carlos;* they consist of the scene of the revolt in the fourth act, which winds up with the death of Posa, in the repetition of the air of Marie Sass in the second, the *stretto* of the duet between Faure and Obin, etc." (*Gazette Musicale* of the 17th of March, 1867).

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forms part of the *répertoire* of a great number of Italian companies; but for all that it has never met with the popularity of some of the works of the master.

It was at the time of the production of *Don Carlos*, and a few days after its first performance, that a very fine bust of Verdi was placed in the public *foyer* of the Opera. This bust, which reproduced with energetic faithfulness the severe and somewhat sombre expression of the master, was the work of the firm and masculine chisel of Dantan *jeune*.[1]

Since the appearance of *Don Carlos*, and in the long space of eighteen years which separates us from that opera, Verdi has written, or at least has produced, but a single dramatic work. It is true that the latter would quite suffice for his glory, for we speak of the fine and noble score of *Aïda*, so powerful in character, so marvellous in colour, so pathetic in sentiment, so pure and elevated in style, which has given in all its splendour the measure of a genius arrived at its completest maturity.

The history of *Aïda* is curious in more than

[1] We may here state that the previous year, before executing this bust, Dantan had made a caricature of the author of *La Traviata*, one of those amusing grotesque statuettes in which he excelled. In it the composer was represented seated at the piano, with a peevish and angry countenance, a long lion's mane falling on his shoulders, and his hands transformed into powerful claws.

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one particular, and I will enter on the subject circumstantially and in detail.

It has been incorrectly stated in France, that *Aïda* was written for the inauguration of the Italian Theatre at Cairo. The theatre, the construction of which was begun in 1869, was finished at the end of six months, and inaugurated in the month of November of the same year. It was due to the munificence of the Khedive (Ismaïl Pacha), a prince of very artistic tastes, who shrank from no difficulty, from no expense, thus to enrich his capital.

However, as soon as this theatre was talked of, the prince was advised, in order to give it more lustre and bring it into notice, to commission Verdi to write expressly for it a new work, if not of a national character, at least of a local nature, and to a certain extent of a patriotic colour.

The Khedive was pleased with the idea, and the master was at once written to with this request, begging him to state his conditions. It is needless to say that he was a little surprised at the proposition made to him; it did not in the main displease him, but he could not decide at all what terms to insist on for the contract offered him. In this difficulty he wrote to his friend and pupil M. Emanuele Muzio, to ask his advice, begging him to suggest a sum

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which he ought to fix for his honorarium. M. Muzio at once replied, laconically :—

"Ask four thousand pounds sterling" (a hundred thousand francs) "for your score. If they ask you to go and mount the piece and to direct the rehearsals, fix the sum at six thousand pounds sterling."

Verdi followed this advice; and, as they did not require his presence at Cairo, asked four thousand pounds sterling, on the condition, naturally, of being first of all informed of the subject which they proposed to him for treatment. These preliminaries were accepted without any hesitation, and they sent him at once the sketch of *Aïda*. I say the sketch, for at that time it was nothing else. The first idea of the drama, which is purely a subject of imagination, belongs entirely to Mariette Bey, the great French Egyptologist, who has based it on historical and archæological details of very powerful and very novel character.[1] Verdi was

[1] "After the revolution of February, 1848, M. Mariette was attached to the Egyptian Museum of the Louvre, and distinguished himself by his knowledge and intelligence. Recommended by the Institut to the attention of the Minister of Public Instruction, he was charged with a scientific mission in Egypt. He left in 1850 for Cairo, with the object of discovering Coptic manuscripts preserved in the monasteries; but, immediately on arriving in the country, his attention was attracted by the monuments showing above the ground on the site occupied by the ancient Memphis. He then undertook investigations which resulted in his finding, under the sand, the temple of the god Serapis, the tombs of the bulls Apis, and

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carried away completely by it at once: in the first place by the grandeur of the general design, and then by the conception of the judgment scene, to which we owe the strange and powerfully dramatic tableau which forms the *dénouement*. He understood all the effect which might be drawn musically from such a subject, and did not hesitate to accept it. The final agreement was then concluded between the Khedive and Verdi; and, in conformity with the terms of this agreement, the sum of fifty thousand francs was paid to him, while the balance, deposited in Paris, was to be handed to him in exchange for the score, as soon as it should be completed.

In the accounts which MM. Reyer and Filippi have given of the performance of *Aïda*, and of their journey to Egypt for this purpose, they agree in stating that, on the plot sketched

a great number of precious monuments. Having obtained a prolongation of his mission, he carried on for four years, in the midst of the desert, those researches which are the most important and the vastest ever made in Egypt. Having brought to light the Serapeum, he cleared, by the help of an allowance furnished by the Duc de Luynes, the celebrated colossus of the Sphinx, and satisfied himself that this gigantic monument had been sculptured as it stood from a natural rock. . . . Having returned to Egypt, he there filled the functions of inspector-general and conservator of the monuments of Egypt, then of director of the museum at Boulaq, and received the title of Bey" (Vapereau, *Dictionnaire des Contemporains*).

Mariette Bey, since dead, was associated so intimately with the creation, the growth, and the public performance of *Aïda*, that it seemed to me that this information about him was not useless.

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out by Mariette Bey, M. du Locle wrote the libretto of the piece, and that the libretto was translated into Italian by M. Ghislanzoni.[1] This question of the paternity of the libretto of *Aïda* remained obscure, and at the time of the representation of the work at the Opera in Paris, a somewhat lively discussion broke out on the subject in the Italian press; the question was settled, and the discussion brought to an end, by the publication of the following letter, which M. du Locle, then in Rome, addressed to a French journal of that town—*L'Italie*:—

ROME, *March 28th*, 1880.

MONSIEUR LE RÉDACTEUR,—As the history of the libretto of *Aïda* raises a discussion in the Roman press, being myself in Rome, I am able to give you accurate particulars on the subject. You were well informed: the first idea of the poem belongs to Mariette Bey, the celebrated Egyptologist. I wrote the libretto scene by scene, phrase by phrase, in French prose, at Busseto, under the eye of the *maestro*, who took a large share in the work. The idea of the finale of the last act, with its two stages one above the other, belongs especially to him.

[1] Two European critics, M. Ernest Reyer, of the *Journal des Debats*, and Dr. Filippo Filippi, of the *Perseveranza*, of Milan, went to Cairo to be present at the performance of *Aïda*, and sent to their respective journals an account of this ceremony. Since then the articles written by them on the subject have been reproduced in two volumes of essays published by the two artists—*Notes de Musique*, by M. Reyer (Paris, Charpentier, 1875, 12mo), and *Musica e Musicisti*, by M. Filippi (Milan, Brigola, 1876, small 8vo).

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To translate this prose into Italian verse was the work of M. Ghislanzoni. These verses were, in their turn, retranslated and adapted to the written music for the French performances.

This, Monsieur le Rédacteur—the inquiry into its paternity not being forbidden in such cases—is what may be called the genesis of *Aïda*. But what a singular caprice has possessed the *Bersagliere* to attempt to stir up the self-love of two nations about the manufacture of a libretto! In any case, is not Italy assured of keeping in *Aïda* all that is of any value—in fact, that which forms the whole? Last year at this place, at the Marionettes, I saw *Aïda* played without music; the work lost strangely by it, I confess, without false modesty for France, both on behalf of Mariette and myself.

Accept, etc., etc.,
C. DU LOCLE.

It is evident from this letter that Verdi himself had a part, and that an important part, in the libretto, as often happened; for it is to him we owe the superb and touching episode of the sentence of Radamès, which he subsequently succeeded in turning to such admirable musical effect.

However this may have been, no sooner was the poem of *Aïda* completed than the composer set to work, and in a few months had written and completed his score. But in the meantime they had reconsidered the matter at Cairo, and

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wrote to invite him to come in person to direct the preparation and the execution of his opera. But little desirous of making this voyage, the master refused; they insisted, offering him money, honours, decorations, for aught I know the title of Bey! He was not to be shaken; nothing would induce him.[1]

Aïda was to be played at Cairo at the end of 1870. One of the conditions of the contract provided that the work might be performed at La Scala at Milan immediately after its appearance in the capital of Egypt; Verdi added that his pupil and friend, M. Muzio, should be charged with the mounting of *Aïda*, and with directing the execution of it in this latter city. As soon as he had put the last touches to his score, they set to work simultaneously, in Cairo and in Paris, getting ready all that was requisite for the *mise en scène*. In fact, following the instructions, the suggestions, and the drawings of Mariette Bey, they worked in Cairo on the accessories and the machinery, while in Paris they got ready the costumes, and painted

[1] Does the reader wish to know the wherefore of this obstinate refusal? It proceeded from a sentiment to which art is an entire stranger. Verdi, in that resembling Rossini, has a profound dread and horror of the sea, and, like the author of *Guillaume Tell*, has trusted himself but once to it, to visit London, swearing that he would never venture on it again. This is the reason which made him formally decline the offer of going to Cairo.

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the scenery in the studios of MM. Chapron, Rubé, and Desplechin. This caused the delay *of a year* in the performance—a delay of which there are doubtless few examples in theatrical annals. The reason was, that while these things were going on, war had broken out in Europe, Paris was besieged, and the scenery and costumes of *Aïda* were shut up in the great city, with its two millions of inhabitants.

At last came the moment when they could set to work seriously with the preparations and studies. The artists charged with the interpretation of the new work were Madame Pozzoni-Anastasi (Aïda), Madame Grossi (Amneris), MM. Mongini (Radamès), Medini (Ramfis), Costa (Amonasro), and Steller (the King), and the orchestra was entrusted to the skilful direction of a sure and experienced chief, Signor Bottesini.[1] It was decided that the

[1] The delay caused in the representation of *Aïda* by the Franco-German war rendered it impossible for M. Muzio, who was bound by a previous engagement, to accede to Verdi's wishes. It was necessary to replace him by Signor Bottesini. On the other hand, this delay allowed the master to work up to the last moment on the retouching of his score. This is proved by the fragment of a somewhat humorous letter which he wrote from Turin, dated November 12th, 1871, to M. Guilio Ricordi, son of his publisher at Milan :—"Dear Guilio, —I am on a jaunt at Turin, with my big packet of music in my hand. Bad luck to it! If only I had a piano and a metronome, I would send you the third act to-night. As I have already told you, I have substituted a chorus and a romance for Aïda in place of another chorus for four voices composed in imitation of Palestrina, which might have made me aspire

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first performance should take place at the end of December, 1871, and it was actually given on Sunday, the 24th. But it was not without difficulty, as will be seen from the details on this subject which I shall borrow from the interesting account of Signor Filippo Filippi. Before doing so, however, I must reproduce the very characteristic letter which Verdi addressed to this writer when he heard that he was getting ready to make the journey to Egypt for the express purpose of hearing *Aïda*, and of reporting for the benefit of the Italian public the ceremony which was being prepared at Cairo; this letter, curious on many accounts, may give a lesson of artistic pride and dignity to more than one of our musicians who are too forgetful of "the chaste muse" of whom Berlioz speaks, and continually "beat the big drum" about their person and their works:—

GENOA, *December 9th*, 1871.

DEAR SIGNOR FILIPPI,—It may seem strange to you, as strange as possible; but forgive me if I cannot withhold all that passes through my mind.

You in Cairo!!! . . . But it is one of the most

(what would Faccio* say to that?) to the post of contrapuntist in some conservatoire. But I have had scruples about *fare alla Palestrina*, about harmony, about Egyptian music. At last it is written! I shall never be a learned musician; I shall always be a *guastamestiere*."

* M. Franco Faccio, *chef d'orchestre* of La Scala at Milan.

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decided *réclames* [1] that can be imagined for *Aïda!* . . . And it seems to me that art looked at in this way is no longer art, but a trade, a party of pleasure, a hunt, anything that can be run after, to which it is desired to give, if not success, at least notoriety at any price! The sentiment produced on me is one of disgust and humiliation! I always call to mind with joy the early days of my career, the time when, with hardly a friend, with no one to talk about me, without preparation, without influence of any sort, I presented myself before the public with my works, ready to receive the *fucilate* ("Let it be performed"), and very happy if I could succeed in producing some slight favourable impression. Now what a piece of work about an opera!!! . . .

Journalists, artists, chorus-singers, directors, professors, etc., etc.—all are expected to bring their stone to the building of the *réclame*, and thus to form a combination of trifles, which add nothing to the merit of the work, and which rather obscure its value (if it have any). This is deplorable—deeply deplorable!!

I thank you for your courteous offer for Cairo; but I wrote the day before yesterday to Bottesini all I had to say respecting *Aïda*. For the work, I wish nothing more than a good, and above all intelligent, vocal and instrumental execution and *mise en scène*.[2] As to the rest, *à la grace de Dieu;*[3] for thus I began, and thus I wish to finish my career.

A pleasant journey to you! and believe me always

Your very devoted

G. VERDI.

[1] The word is in French in the text.
[2] In French. [3] *Ibid.*

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This letter, it will be readily understood, did not prevent M. Filippo Filippi from making his journey, and this is how he related his impressions about the last rehearsals of *Aïda*:—

"When I saw, at the last rehearsal but one, that the *mise en scène* was so behindhand, I could not bring myself to believe that they could have a good general rehearsal on Saturday and risk the first performance on Sunday. But a higher will ordered the miracle, and the miracle was performed. The Viceroy had said that he was starting on Tuesday for a long excursion in Upper Egypt, and that he wished to be present at the first performance of *Aïda*. His wish was law. The rehearsal of Saturday had a heroic effect on everybody; it suffices to say that it lasted from seven o'clock at night till half-past three in the morning, in the presence of the subscribers, who remained, nearly all, in their places up to the end, comprising the ladies in the boxes and the Viceroy himself, with all his suite.

"This general rehearsal decided the success; for with the subscribers present, with the theatre lighted up, with the artists in costume, it differed from a first performance in no other respect than by the unusual intervals between the acts, caused by the incomplete preparation of the *mise en scène*. And at the performance, there were

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ovations, applause, shouts of enthusiasm, and then in animated conversations carried on during the *entr'actes* an interchange of admiration for this great work, and a deep satisfaction at the distinguished honour reserved for the theatre at Cairo to have given life to so grand a musical composition. All the pieces, from the prelude to the final *duo*, were applauded, and even interrupted in consequence of the too great fervour of the impatient listeners. In the hymn which winds up the first part of the first act, there is a loud suspended chord, which was followed by an explosion of applause; Bottesini, annoyed at this unseasonable interruption, turned towards the audience and cried out in pure Milan accent, 'L'é minga fenii'—'It is not done.'

"When at half-past three in the morning the rehearsal was finished, we left the theatre, all of us enchanted at having heard the new work of the great master. . . . The most satisfied of all was assuredly the Khedive; he could not contain himself for joy, and ordered a telegram to be sent at once in his name to Verdi to congratulate and thank him."

We shall see that the first performance, although given in Egypt, yielded in nothing to European ceremonies of this kind. Here I again let M. F. Filippi speak:—

"The curiosity, the madness of the Egyptian

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public to be present at the first performance of *Aïda* were such, that for a fortnight all the places were bought up, and at the last moment the speculators sold boxes and stalls for their weight in gold. When I say the Egyptian public, I speak especially of the Europeans; for the Arabs, even the rich, do not care for our spectacles: they prefer the chanting of their own songs, the monotonous beatings of their tambourines, to all the melodies of the past, the present, and the future. It is a perfect miracle to see a turban in the theatres of Cairo.

"On Sunday night the theatre was crowded from top to bottom long before the performance began; ladies occupied the boxes in great numbers, and one's attention was distracted by unseasonable chattering, or by the rustling of their garments. Speaking generally, I found much beauty and elegance, particularly among the Greeks and foreigners of high extraction, who are numerous in Cairo; I ought also to say, from love of truth, that by the side of the handsomest and the best dressed were to be seen every evening the faces of Copts and Jews, with strange headgears, impossible costumes, colours which clashed so violently, that nothing worse could be imagined. As to the ladies of the harem of the Court, no one could see them; they occupied the first three boxes to the right,

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on the second tier, and a thick white muslin hid their faces from indiscreet looks." [1]

It is needless to say that the success was as great at the performance as it had been at the rehearsal; it must be added that it was unanimous, and that not a single voice was found to contest it. It will be interesting, I think, to reproduce here the impression of the only French critic who was present at the performance of the new work of this illustrious master. It is thus M. Reyer expressed himself, after hearing the work, in the first printed lines which appeared in France on the subject of *Aïda*:[2]—

"If the opera of M. Verdi had been mediocre, I should have said so without evasion; it has succeeded, and it deserved to

[1] M. Reyer, whose impressions on the subject of *Aïda* I am about to reproduce, thus described the house at the Cairo theatre:—"The theatre of Cairo is disposed and arranged in the interior like most of the Italian theatres; there are neither gallery stalls nor balcony stalls, and the *baignoires* command the orchestra. The decoration, dead gold on a white ground, is in perfect taste; the interior of the boxes is dark red; the front is furnished with velvet hangings of the same colour; a vestibule with columns leads to the entrance of the stalls, and opens on to two lateral staircases, which give access to the upper tiers. The *foyer* is on the second tier; it is spacious and magnificently decorated, forming a promenade during the *entr'actes*. Spectators with 'tarbouches' come into the vestibule and smoke their cigarettes there, reading with much gravity a notice which forbids smoking."

[2] *Feuilleton* of the *Journal des Débats* of the 16th January, 1872, republished in a volume called *Notes de Musique*.

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succeed: I am delighted to spread abroad the good news, and to congratulate the *maestro*, for whom, as is well known, I have never testified either much admiration, or great sympathy.

"To those who deny advancement in music, M. Verdi has just replied, as did the philosopher of old, 'And yet it does move.' Truly, the old Verdi still exists; he is to be found again in *Aïda*, with his exaggerations, his strong contrasts, his neglect of style, and his sudden outbursts. But another Verdi, tinged with Germanism, shows himself also, making use, with great skill, science, and tact, which would not have been suspected in him, of all the artifices of fugue and counterpoint, joining together different qualities of tone with a rare ingenuity, breaking the old melodic forms, even those which were peculiar to him, dwelling lovingly by turns on grand recitatives and long melodies, searching out the newest harmonies, sometimes the strangest, the most unexpected modulations, giving to the accompaniment more interest, often more importance, than to the melody itself,—in short, as Grétry said in speaking of Mozart, sometimes putting the statue in the orchestra, and leaving the pedestal on the stage. I have never quite grasped the force of this expression; but it is

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so generally accepted that I make use of it without the least scruple.

"Ah! let no one say now, 'M. Verdi lives in the most perfect isolation, and remains absolutely indifferent to every new work, to every new system.' I was assured some years ago that he had never read *Don Giovanni.* It is possible; but since then he has, without doubt, read it, and he has even gone much farther. I am perfectly certain that the works of Richard Wagner are familiar to him, and equally so those of Berlioz. He must also have studied just a little the scores of Meyerbeer, and have made himself acquainted with what M. Gounod has done, which is not always on the surface. His studies in these different styles were perhaps only rough sketches when he wrote *Don Carlos;* at present they are far advanced, if not absolutely complete. And, if he persist in his new style, the *maestro* Verdi, although some of his enthusiastic admirers may become cool, will work many conversions, and make many disciples, even in those exclusive circles which hitherto have scarcely recognised him.

"It is certainly not the transformation of Gluck, nor that of Rossini, nor that of Meyerbeer, passing from *Margarita d'Angiù* or from *Il Crociato* to *Robert le Diable,* but at least it is

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something more than a simple development, and those who know the abrupt nature and the undisciplined character of the Italian master will recognise in the design and tendencies which the score of *Aïda* reveals something more, and something better, than vague promises for the future." [1]

We have seen above that Verdi had reserved the right of representation of *Aïda* at Milan immediately after its production at Cairo. In fact, while the work was being given in the latter city, they were busy with it at La Scala, where it was played six weeks later, on the 7th February, 1872. It is needless to say that there also, in that cradle of the glory and renown of the master, its success was brilliant and spontaneous. The very night of the first performance, after the second act, a deputation of artists had an

[1] It is hardly to be supposed, as M. Reyer gives us to understand, that Verdi had for a long time been unacquainted with the score of *Don Giovanni*. Besides, this very doubtful assertion has been answered by the following curious anecdote:—"*Don Giovanni* was put on the stage at La Scala in 1834 by Lavigna, the master of Verdi, and with a few interruptions, was performed for nearly a year, so great was its success. Now, during the evenings which Verdi was in the habit of spending with Lavigna, the latter, after having talked for a time, never missed saying to him :—'Giuseppe, let us have a look at *Don Giovanni;*' then, going to the piano, he played it first, and analysed it afterwards. This went on through the whole year, so that at the end, to tell the truth, Verdi was satiated with *Don Giovanni*. He knew it by heart, he admired it, he respected it, but he had a surfeit of it, which lasted for a long time."

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interview with Verdi, and presented him with a superb sceptre of ivory, adorned with a diamond star, similar to the one carried by the King of Egypt in the opera; on this sceptre the name of *Aïda* was set in rubies, whilst that of Verdi stood out in precious stones on a branch of laurel. This princely gift was the result of a subscription got up among the first families of Milan.

The interpreters of *Aïda* at Milan were Mesdames Teresina Stolz and Waldmann, MM. Fancelli, Pandolfini, and Maini, that is to say precisely the same who a little later came to execute the work in Paris. I ought to mention that it is indirectly to Madame Stolz that we owe the composition of the only quartet for stringed instruments that Verdi has ever written. At the beginning of 1873, at the time when the performance of *Aïda* was in preparation at the theatre of San Carlo at Naples, Madame Stolz having again undertaken the principal part, this great artist fell suddenly ill, so seriously that the preparation of the work had to be completely interrupted. Verdi, who had gone to Naples to direct their studies, and who could never stand inactively, did not know how to employ the forced leisure which was thus created. It was then that he formed the idea of writing a quartet in free style, the finale

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of which, however, presents a strict fugue, with all its development. It was one of those cases where misfortune has its good side; Madame Stolz alone might well entertain a different opinion.[1]

I need hardly say that *Aïda*, borne on the wings of success, rapidly made the tour of Italy —*il suo giro d'Italia*. But yet, while it excited general enthusiasm, it was not without arousing, as all masterpieces will, certain individual pro-

[1] This delay in the production of *Aïda* at Naples did not interfere in any way with the success of the work, which was received with a perfect frenzy of enthusiasm. We have a proof in the following lines, which an excellent critic of that city, M. Carlo Caputo, sent at the time to a Venetian journal, *La Scena*.

"To sum up," said he, in speaking of the first performance, "it was a unique event in the history of San Carlo, and the oldest *habitués* of the theatre remember nothing like it. If Naples were Paris, where everything is caught up, we should already have *Aïda* applied to numberless objects indispensable to the comfort of our everyday life. What, without doubt, will in future result from this event will be, that when people wish to express the highest opinion of a concert, a piece, a singer, a *virtuoso*, a composer, etc., it will be called *un successo all' 'Aïda.'*

"And the success of *Aïda* did not only reach the maximum, but it went beyond it by several kilometres. You will certainly have been able to judge of this from the reports of the local papers; I can assure you that the accounts given by reporters and *feuilletonistes* are but colourless compared with the reality. For the last few days we have been living a life which has long seemed a thing of the past in Naples. It was a delight, an ecstasy, something like a scene from the *Arabian Nights*, an emanation, an intoxicating harmony, which, issuing from the throats of singers, from the depths of the orchestra, from the scenery and decoration, from the perfection of the *ensemble*, and above all from the gigantic work of the composer, found the echo of their notes in each fibre of

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tests, some of which, it must be allowed, took a form truly original. Among others, I may mention one which was certainly a model of its kind.

Here is the letter which a melomaniac, or a melophobe, addressed to Verdi after having been present at a performance of *Aïda*:—

REGGIO (EMILIA), *May 7th*, 1872.

MUCH-HONOURED SIGNOR VERDI,—The 2nd of this month I went to Parma, drawn there by the sensation made by your opera *Aïda*. So great was my curiosity, that one half-hour before the commencement of the piece, I was already in my place, No. 120. I admired the *mise en scène*, I heard with pleasure the excellent singers, and I did all in my power to let nothing escape me. At the end of the opera, I asked if I was satisfied, and the answer was "No." I started back to Reggio, and listened in the railway carriage to the opinions

thousands of spectators, and from thousands of others who crowded round the entrances of the theatre, in which they could not find room, and which spread like electricity, even giving rise at last to that phantasmagoric demonstration, by means of which they wished to honour Verdi, from the doors of San Carlo to that of his residence at the Hotel Crocelle. And when those tragic *straight trumpets*, at the pressing demand of the cheering crowd, resounded anew under the windows of Verdi with the characteristic and inspired triumphal march of the second act of *Aïda*, by the light of thousand upon thousand torches, which illuminated the shore of the Chiatamone, those who at that hour were able to be on the sea, on that sea placid and quiet like a summer's night, softly lighted up by the pale rays of the moon, these might well believe that the Siren had in truth come again to life, and with her voice of fascination was bidding all the nymphs of the enchanted gulf to rise, and sing a hymn in praise of the great *maestro*" (*La Scena* of Venice, April 19th, 1873).

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given upon *Aïda*. Nearly all agreed in considering it a work of the first order.

I was then seized with the idea of hearing it again, and on the 4th I returned to Parma; I made unheard-of efforts to get a reserved seat; as the crowd was enormous, I was obliged to throw away five liri to witness the performance in any comfort.

I arrived at this decision about it: it is an opera in which there is absolutely nothing which causes any enthusiasm or excitement, and without the pomp of the spectacle, the public would not stand it to the end. When it has filled the house two or three times, it will be banished to the dust of the archives.

You can now, dear Signor Verdi, picture to yourself my regret at having spent on two occasions thirty-two liri; add to this the aggravating circumstance that I depend on my family, and that this money troubles my rest like a frightful spectre. I therefore frankly address myself to you, in order that you may send me the amount. The account is as follows:—

	Liri.
Railroad—going	2·60
,, —returning	3·30
Theatre	8
Detestable supper at the station	2
	15·90
Twice	2
	31·80

Hoping that you will deliver me from this embarrassment, I salute you from my heart.

BERTANI.

My address: Bertani Prospero, Via San Domenico, No. 5.

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One can easily imagine the surprise of the composer on receiving this communication; however, he took the matter in good part, and, using his publisher, M. Ricordi, as intermediary, he charged him to satisfy this frank despiser of *Aïda*, on condition of his swearing that he would not renew the application.

"You may well imagine," wrote he to M. Ricordi, "that to protect the son of a family from the spectres which pursue him, I will willingly pay the little bill which he sends me. I therefore beg you to forward by one of your correspondents to this M. Prospero Bertani, Via San Domenico, No. 5, the sum of 27 liri 80 centimes. It is not the amount he demands; but that in addition I should be expected to pay for his supper, certainly not! He might very well take his meals at home.

"It is understood that he will give you an acknowledgment, and further a short letter in reply, undertaking to hear my new operas no more, exposing himself no more to the menaces of spectres, and sparing me further travelling expenses."

The publisher Ricordi believed that it was a joke, and wrote to Reggio with the expectation of not finding any Bertani. Contrary to this view, the latter did exist; the negotiations were rapid, and the sum offered by Verdi was ex-

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changed for the little conditional receipt of which this is the tenor:—

REGGIO, *May 15th*, 1872.

I the undersigned acknowledge to have received from the *maestro* G. Verdi the sum of 27 liri 80 centimes, by way of repayment of my travelling expenses to Parma to hear *Aïda*, the master having considered it fair that this sum should be returned to me, as I did not find his opera to my taste. It is at the same time agreed that in future I shall not make any journey to hear new operas of the master unless he undertakes the entire expense, whatever may be my opinion of his works.

In faith of which I have signed,

BERTANI PROSPERO.

I have another no less comic incident about *Aïda* to tell, but as this at the same time has something to do with the *Requiem*, I will speak of it further on, when treating of this last work.

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CHAPTER XII.

The *Requiem* Mass for the anniversary of the death of Manzoni.—Its origin.—New letters of Verdi.—The performance of the *Requiem* at Milan, subsequently at Paris.—*Aida* at the Théâtre Italien in Paris, and afterwards at the Opera.

In the early months of 1873 there died at Milan, full of years and glory, one of the most justly celebrated men of contemporary Italy, one of the greatest patriots, one of the most exquisite poets, which that land, so fertile in both, had produced; I speak of Alessandro Manzoni. I had the opportunity of seeing at Milan itself, a few weeks after, how touching, how unanimous, was the respect which the Milanese had devoted to the memory of their virtuous and illustrious fellow-citizen.

His name had already been given to one of the handsomest streets of the city, previously called Via del Giardino, which leads from the Piazza di La Scala to the Piazza Cavour; they had hastened to dedicate to him a new and charming theatre, which thus took the title of the Teatro Alessandro Manzoni; a national subscription was opened for the purpose of

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erecting a monument to him, and certain public offices received offerings for that purpose; studies on his life and on his works were published on all sides,[1] whilst a popular edition was brought out of his celebrated romance, *I Promessi Sposi*, which was exposed for sale in the windows of all the booksellers and of all the kiosks, and which the street dealers offered you everywhere: on the cathedral square, on that of La Scala, in the galleries Victor-Emanuele, etc.; in fact, his portrait was to be found in all the shops, in engraving, in lithography, in photography; his bust was to be seen everywhere; even the match-boxes which boys offered you in the streets for a sou bore his likeness. If ever a great poet has called forth on his death-bed the gratitude of his fellow-countrymen, we may say that it is the author of *Carmagnola*, of *Adelghis*, and of the *Inni Sacri*.

Verdi, who was united by deep affection to Manzoni, and felt for him a sort of filial respect, was at his villa of Sant'-Agata when the news of the poet's death reached him. He was deeply grieved, and for some time remained dull and pensive, as if overcome by an inward

[1] I will quote, among others, *Alessandro Manzoni*, by Francesco Trevisan; *Alessandro Manzoni, Studio Biografico e Critico*, by Vittorio Bersezio, the admirable Piedmontese story-teller; *Alessandro Manzoni, ossia il Progresso Morale, Civile e Letterario*, by Dr. Angelo Buccellato (2 vols.); *La Mente di Alessandro Manzoni*, by Giuseppe Rovani.

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preoccupation. One day he asked a friend who was on a visit to accompany him as far as Milan, where he had some business. The latter agreeing, they both started on their journey, and only then did Verdi confide to his friend the thought which had occurred to him of writing a *Requiem* Mass, designed to celebrate in a solemn manner the first anniversary of the great poet's death.

Having arrived in Milan, the master put up, as was his custom, at the Albergo Milano, and at once wrote to the senator Belinzaghi, syndic of the city, to inform him of his project, offering to compose a *Requiem* to be executed the following year for the anniversary of Manzoni. The syndic immediately went to Verdi to tender his thanks in person, and the very same day addressed a special summons to the members of the municipality, acquainting them with the proposition which had been made to him. The offer was accepted, as may be supposed, and by a unanimous vote. The council forthwith drew up an address of thanks to the master, and it was decided during the sitting that the execution of the *Requiem* should take place in whichever church Verdi should choose; that all the expenses should be at the charge of the municipality; finally, that invitations should be addressed to the greatest artists of Italy, both

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singers and instrumentalists, begging them to take part in this ceremony, which was at the same time artistic and patriotic.[1]

All this being happily arranged, Verdi left for France, and there, during the summer of 1873, he wrote the greater part of his Mass, of which one piece, the *Libera me*, was already composed. The history of this piece is worth recounting, for it recalls facts of interest.

At the time of the death of Rossini (November 13th, 1868), Verdi formed the intention of having an original *Requiem* performed in honour of the illustrious master, whose birth Italy had witnessed, and whom the whole world mourned. But it was not proposed that this *Requiem* should be written entirely by him. His ideas on this subject were clearly explained in the following letter, which he addressed at

[1] This is the letter in which Verdi replied to the address of the municipal council :—

MOST ILLUSTRIOUS LORD SYNDIC,—No thanks are due to me, either from yourself or from the council, for the offer which I have made to write a funeral mass for the anniversary of Manzoni. It is an impulse, or, to speak more correctly, a desire of my heart, which impels me to honour, as far as lies in my power, this great man, whom I esteemed so much as a writer, and venerated as a man, and who was a model of virtue and patriotism.

When the musical work is sufficiently advanced, I will not fail to let you know the conditions which will be necessary in order to make the execution worthy both of the country and of the man whose loss we deplore.

With the deepest esteem and consideration, I have the honour to be, most illustrious syndic, Your very devoted

SANT'-AGATA, *June 9th*, 1873. G. VERDI.

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that time to his old friend, Signor Tito Ricordi, the celebrated publisher of music at Milan :—

SANT'-AGATA, *November 18th*, 1868.

MY DEAR RICORDI,—To honour the memory of Rossini, I am desirous that all the most distinguished composers of Italy (headed by Mercadante, if it were only for a few bars) should compose a *Requiem* Mass to be executed on the anniversary of his death. I wish that not only the composers, but also all the performers, in addition to their personal concurrence, should offer their mite to pay the expenses. I wish that no hand foreign to Italy or to art, whatever may be its worth, come to our assistance; without that condition I at once withdraw from the association.

The Mass should be executed in the church of San Petronio at Bologna, which was the true musical country of Rossini. This Mass ought to be neither an object of curiosity nor of speculation; but immediately after its execution, it ought to be sealed and placed in the archives of the Lyceum of Music of Bologna, from which it should never be taken. Perhaps, however, an exception might be made for the anniversaries of Rossini, when our descendants might wish to celebrate it.

If I were in the good graces of St. Peter, I would beg him to be kind enough to allow, at least for this once only, that women should take part in the performance of this Mass;[1] but as I am not, it will be necessary to find some one more suitable than myself to attain this end.

[1] It is well known that the Church does not allow women to sing in her services; it is only on exceptional occasions that she consents to grant a dispensation.

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It will be necessary to form a committee of intelligent men to arrange the order of this manifestation, and especially to make the choice of composers, to distribute the pieces, and to superintend the general form of the work.

This composition (whatever may be the beauty of the separate pieces) will necessarily be deficient in musical unity; but, if it have defects on that account, it will suffice nevertheless to show how great is our veneration for the man whose loss the whole world deplores. Adieu.

Believe me, your affectionate

G. VERDI.

This idea was hailed by the artists with the greatest favour. The projected work was divided into thirteen parts, which were confided to thirteen composers. All measures were rigorously taken, the form and tonality of each of the pieces were settled, and the Mass was divided in the following manner:—

No. 1.	*Requiem æternum* (in G minor) .	Signor BUZZOLA.
,, 2.	*Dies iræ* (C minor)	,, BAZZINI.
,, 3.	*Tuba mirum* (E♭ minor) . . .	,, PEDROTTI.
,, 4.	*Quid sum miser* (A♭ major) . .	,, CAGNONI.
,, 5.	*Recordare* (F major)	,, F. RICCI.
,, 6.	*Ingemisco* (A minor)	,, NINI.
,, 7.	*Confutatis* (D major)	,, BOUCHERON.
,, 8.	*Lacrymosa* (G major & C minor)	,, COCCIA.
,, 9.	*Domine, Jesu* (C major) . . .	,, GASPARI.
,, 10.	*Sanctus* (D♭ major)	,, PLATANIA.
,, 11.	*Agnus Dei* (F major)	,, PETRELLA.
,, 12.	*Lux æterna* (A♭ major) . . .	,, MABELLINI.
,, 13.	*Libera me* (C minor)	,, VERDI.[1]

[1] It will be seen that in spite of the wish expressed by Verdi, the name of Mercadante did not appear in the list. The great age and the feeble state of health of this patriarch of Italian

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As chief of the modern Italian school, the last page of the work—that which was to wind up this grand manifestation, suggested by himself, in honour of the greatest Italian master of the nineteenth century—was reserved for Verdi. The Mass was completed ; but from some combination of circumstances, independent of the wishes of the composers, of the nature of which I am ignorant, the project was not put into execution, and the work did not appear.

Verdi was one of the first to send in his contribution, which he subsequently took back, as did all his *confrères*. He performed it one day to a friend, the same who accompanied him in that visit to Milan undertaken, as we have seen, with a view of rendering honour to the memory of Manzoni ; and this friend, having read the score attentively, said to him :

"So fine a movement would form the inspiration of an admirable Mass. You ought to write the *Requiem* completely."

This he did, as we have seen.

When his *Requiem* was completed, Verdi went to Milan, where all the arrangements necessary for the performance were in progress. The church selected was that of San Marco ;

music—for he was at that time seventy-three years old, and had been blind for several years (he died less than two years afterwards)—no doubt prevented him from taking his part in the work.

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and the singers chosen by the master were Mesdames Teresina Stolz and Waldmann, MM. Capponi and Maini ; the orchestra was formed of one hundred performers, and the chorus of one hundred and twenty, the whole united under the direction of the composer. The date was fixed for the 22nd May, 1874, and from all parts, not only of Italy, but of Europe, that is to say of France, Germany, Austria, etc., musicians, critics, amateurs, and *virtuosi* crowded to Milan.

The success at the church was immense. Beyond the excellence of the work itself, it must be stated that the performance was marvellous, not only on the part of the solo singers, all experienced artists, and endowed with admirable voices, but also on the part of the orchestra, in which were found the leaders of all the great theatres of Italy. The chorus was composed almost exclusively of a number of singers from the great lyric theatres, to whom were joined the best pupils of the Conservatoire of Milan.

After the ceremony, the syndic, Signor Giulio Belinzaghi, addressed to Verdi an official letter of thanks, to which the latter replied in the following terms :—

Illustrious Lord Syndic,—The sad news of the death of Manzoni impelled me to write the *Requiem*

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Mass. It was an impulse of the heart, a tribute of respectful affection, the expression of my sorrow.

It is now a very great satisfaction to me to learn from you, Signor Syndic, that this act of mine has been agreeable to your lordship, and to the municipality which you so worthily represent.

I thank you for the courteous words which you have been good enough to address to me, and beg to renew the sentiments of my esteem.

Your very devoted

G. VERDI.

MILAN, *May 25th*, 1874.

But the syndic did not remain satisfied with the single performance, which took place at San Marco, and he asked Verdi's permission to allow the Mass to be executed three times at the theatre of La Scala, in order to give all those—and they were many—who had not been fortunate enough to be present at the ceremony the possibility of hearing so fine and so touching a work. The master not only agreed willingly to this desire, but declared that he would again conduct in person the first of these performances, the two others being confided to the skill of Signor Franco Faccio, the *chef d'orchestre* of La Scala.[1] One can imagine

[1] Verdi could not do more. His *collaborateur* in *Aida*, M. Camille du Locle, at that time director of the Opéra Comique, had expressed a desire to perform the *Requiem* at that theatre, with the artists who sang it at Milan. Arrangements were made for that purpose, and eight days exactly

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what was the success at the theatre, where the audience, no longer under the same restraint, could give free vent to their enthusiasm. However, in order to give an exact idea of the reception which the spectators at La Scala accorded to this magnificent work, it may be of interest to reproduce here this fragment of a report made by a Milan journal, *Il Sole* :—

"The stage had been arranged as a concert-room; on one side, to the left, the orchestra had been massed; on the other, to the right, was placed the chorus. Before them, in proper order, were grouped the fair and trusty pupils of our Conservatorium, entirely dressed in white, with a scarf of black velvet across.

"When the dial of the theatre pointed to nine o'clock, the four artists entrusted with the solos, Mesdames Stolz and Waldmann, Capponi and Maini, came on the stage. Madame Stolz wore a becoming costume of blue silk, trimmed with white velvet, and Mademoiselle Waldmann was dressed all in pink. The appearance of these redoubtable artists was the first signal for applause, which became formidable when Verdi appeared. But the latter, grave as usual,

after the ceremony at San Marco, on the 29th May, the *chef-d'œuvre* was given at the Opéra Comique. But Verdi, obliged to go to Paris before his singers to rehearse the chorus and orchestra, was compelled to leave Milan immediately after the first performance conducted by him at La Scala.

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taking his position at the desk in the centre of the theatre, and facing the four singers, who were near the orchestra, gave the signal of attack, and the applause ceased as by enchantment.

"To follow the pieces one by one would be quite impossible; but we will say, nevertheless, that all were applauded with rapture. The *Dies Iræ*, with all the episodes which it comprises, was received with extraordinary favour.

"But at the offertory the enthusiasm knew no bounds, and the public insisted on the repetition of this admirable quartet with chorus. They also encored the *Sanctus*, a fugue for double chorus, which was performed wonderfully. The magic wand of Verdi seemed to have electrified all the performers.

"At the *Agnus Dei*, the applause grew louder, and suppressed shouts broke out during the performance, so powerful was the inspiration which it revealed. The public, although they had exacted the repetition of the two preceding pieces, and although consideration for the artists warned them not to insist upon it in this case, could not refrain from unanimously crying out, 'Bis!' It was so overwhelming a demonstration that Verdi could do no less than obey with courtesy."

After the offertory had been repeated, a

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silver crown was presented to Verdi on an elegant cushion, whilst the public applauded with rapture.

We see with what enthusiasm the people of Milan received the work of its favourite musician.[1] The success was no less at the Opéra Comique, where, as I have said, the *Requiem* was executed, with the same singers, eight days after the performance at Milan. Four performances of it were given, which attracted a prodigious crowd, but these were far from satisfying the eagerness of the public. In the months of April and May, therefore, of the following year, eight more performances were given, all under the direction of the composer; on this occasion also Mesdames Stolz and Waldmann gave the master the assistance of their superb talent, but their original partners were replaced by two other singers, MM. Masini and Medini.[2]

[1] The performance of the *Requiem* in the church of San Marco, given under artistic conditions of absolutely exceptional superiority, had, nevertheless, only cost the moderate sum of seven thousand francs (£280). They had only to pay the actual expenses, all the performers, at the head of whom were the four solo singers, refusing to accept any kind of fee. But the municipality had not even to expend the seven thousand francs. Verdi's publisher, M. Ricordi, agreed with the master in arranging the three performances at La Scala, in such a manner that he was able to put into the municipal chest a sum of eight thousand francs, which more than covered the expenses incurred for the ceremony of San Marco.

[2] After the third performance the Minister of Fine Arts announced to Verdi that he had been nominated commander

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And the same artists appeared again the following year at the Théâtre Italien, in company with MM. Pandolfini and De Reszké, to introduce at last that noble and touching work *Aïda* to the Parisian public, almost the last in Europe to hear and to applaud it. With that object, Verdi's French publisher, Leon Escudier, had taken the direction of our Italian stage, previously closed for several years.[1] As he had done for his *Requiem*, the composer came here to superintend the preparation of his work, and he directed in person the first two performances, confiding afterwards this care to his pupil, M. Muzio. The parts of *Aïda* were distributed in the following manner: Aïda, Madame Stolz; Amneris, Mademoiselle Waldmann; Radamès, M. Masini; Amonasro, M. Pandolfini; Ramfis, M. Medini; the King, M. Ed. de Reszké. The work was played for the first time on the 22nd April, 1876, with

of the Legion of Honour. [It will be remembered that a series of performances of the work was given at the Albert Hall, with the same quartet of principals.]

[1] "... Since then" (1872, the time of the first performance of *Aïda* at Cairo) "the work has been given in Italy, in America, at Vienna, and at St. Petersburg, everywhere except in London and Paris. Without the happy initiative of M. Escudier, it is very probable we should not have heard it so soon. The Parisian public is under an obligation to the publisher of the works of Verdi for having thought of reopening the Théâtre Italien expressly to give us the chance of becoming acquainted with *Aïda*, one of the finest operas which have been given on any stage for the last fifteen years" (*Annales du Théâtre et de la Musique*, 1876).

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immense success. The first five performances produced a receipt of 97,730 francs; the five following reached the figure of 89,347 francs; which gives for these ten nights a total of 187,077 francs, say an average of 18,707 francs 70 cents. In the space of three years, *Aïda* furnished the Théâtre Italien with a series of sixty-eight performances.[1]

But the French success of *Aïda* was not to stop there. Already, some years previously, the Opera, at that time under the direction of M. Halanzier, had made an effort to obtain what may justly be called Verdi's *chef-d'œuvre*. To this end direct overtures had been made to the master, and he was asked to authorise the performance of the French version of *Aïda* on our principal lyric stage. Unfortunately, Verdi, who is perhaps a little more susceptible and suspicious than is reasonable, thought he had to complain of certain proceedings which had from time to time occurred during his connection with the Opera, and he still bore a grudge on the subject. He replied, therefore, to M. Halanzier's propositions by the following letter, the cold and somewhat dry politeness of

[1] It is needless to say that the cast of the work underwent great modifications. Among others, Mademoiselle Waldmann appeared no more after the first season, having left the stage on her marriage with Count Massari, of Ferrara, which took place at Vienna.

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which did not allow any hope of obtaining the desired permission :—

BUSSETO, *24th August*, 1873.

SIR,—I thank you very much for the courteous manner with which you have proposed to enter into business relations with me. I am also especially flattered that you have thought the score of *Aïda* worthy of the Opera. But, in the first place, I am too imperfectly acquainted with the *personnel* of the Opera ; and, secondly, permit me to confess, I have been so little satisfied each time that I have had to do with your great theatre, that I am not disposed to risk a new attempt.

Possibly later, if you preserve your good intentions towards me, I may change my mind. But at present I have not the courage to face again all the trickery and opposition which rule in that theatre, of which I have preserved a painful recollection.

Excuse me, sir, if I have explained my ideas with perhaps too much frankness ; but I was desirous of speaking to you frankly, so as to leave no uncertainty. This does not prevent me from having for you, sir, personally, a feeling of gratitude for the courteous expressions with which you have been good enough to honour me in your letter.

Believe me, etc.,

VERDI.[1]

[1] The astonishing escapade of Mademoiselle Sophie Cruvelli at the time of the production of *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* will be remembered ; this was no doubt one of the grievances of Verdi against the Opera, although in this case it was not to blame. Another incident which took place at the time of the resumption of this work especially rankled in his heart. It was in

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Nevertheless, what Verdi did not see his way to grant to M. Halanzier, he granted without much difficulty to his successor. M. Vaucorbeil, whose recent death has received so much notice, had undertaken the direction of the Opera on the 16th July, 1879. Two months had hardly elapsed since his installation, when, towards the end of September, he started for Italy. His object was to go and visit Verdi, in his retreat at Sant'-Agata, to beg of him the

1863. M. Perrin, who had been appointed manager for a few months, proposed this resumption, and, hearing of the arrival of Verdi in Paris, begged him to be good enough to preside at the rehearsals. Verdi one day had the orchestra called together, that orchestra of the Opera which, we know, shows at times rather excessive ideas of independence. These gentlemen thought they had no need to rehearse, and allowed some bad humour to be apparent. The time of one piece having been taken more quickly than the master liked, he made a remark on the subject to Dietsch, the *chef d'orchestre*, who made the band begin it again; but then, in order to annoy the composer, they dragged the piece in an exaggerated way. Verdi, losing patience, immediately stamped with his foot, and in a dry tone said to Dietsch: "It is a poor joke, no doubt!" "The fact is, *maestro*," replied Dietsch, "these gentlemen think that they have no need to rehearse." "Really?" "Yes; they have their own private business." "Ah, they have their own business, which is not that of the Opera. That makes a difference." And Verdi took his hat and went away, and never appeared again at the Opera.

Dietsch had certainly been wrong in not making the composer respected, as well as himself. But he was cruelly punished for it: three days afterwards he received notice of his being placed on the retired list, and the following week he was replaced by George Hainl. It is said that he died of grief at the end of two years. It is evident that the lesson had been a severe one. In the face of this fact, and in view of the satisfaction which was made to him under these circumstances, it may be said that Verdi's rancour was obstinate.

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score of *Aïda;* and in order the better to ensure the success of his project, he got a personal friend of the master, M. de Lauzières-Thémines (a Frenchman born in Italy, and connected with that country by warm affection and deep ties), to accompany him. A very grave magazine, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, announces the fortunate result of M. Vaucorbeil's journey in the following manner:—

". . . The hospitable reception by the *châtelain* of Sant'-Agata of M. Vaucorbeil was not doubtful; but it was less easy to predict the manner in which the director of the Opera would get through this difficulty. What he had to do, in fact, was to carry off Hermione under the guise of Aïda, and still more, to make an agreement with the foremost, or, we may almost say, the only dramatic artist of our time, to overcome his more or less legitimate repugnance, and to induce him to undertake a new composition.

"On this last point, if I may trust to what is reported, no agreement was immediately arrived at. The master avoided giving a decision, and, too polite to indulge in recrimination about the past, he avoided making any engagement for the future.

"At dinner the conversation was about one thing and another; they then returned to the

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salon in good humour, and already better acquainted.

"M. Vaucorbeil is a born musician; whether in the position he occupies at present this quality is, or is not, an advantage, it is none the less true that it exists, and is a ruling passion with him. Put him in front of a pianoforte; if it is shut, he will open it; if it is open, he will sit down at it. The pianoforte of Verdi was open; he ran his eyes over a manuscript which chanced to be on the desk, and his fingers instinctively translated the paraphrase of the *Pater* written by a certain Dante in the fourteenth century, with a view to a certain musician of the nineteenth, author of the Mass for Manzoni.

"Every one listened in silence. Verdi unconsciously drew nearer; art exercised its magic; and M. Vaucorbeil, unintentionally, gained the cause of the director of the Opera. Perhaps it is claiming too much to say that he did not think of it; but that is not my business. Where language fails, music steps in; directors who speak and write gain nothing; a director who sings appears, and the charm prevails.

"The next day, when they reassembled, night had brought counsel. Verdi, returning from his morning walk, caught sight of his guest, came to him with open heart, and hold-

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ing out his hand, placed himself completely at his service, leaving him free in the choice of artists, of the arrangement of the *mise en scène*, of the steps required to improve the acoustic condition of the house, and undertaking, if things went on to the satisfaction of the director of the Opera, to come to Paris, and conduct the first three performances.

"Beyond this, even on the question of a new work, he did not appear unapproachable, and from that time the difficulty of finding a poem alone remained: 'Remember that I am a man of the theatre, and that I must be carried away by my subject. I must have characters and situations. Without that—no success!'"

We have heard no more since that time of the new work which Verdi had consented to write for the Opera; but there can be no doubt that M. Vaucorbeil returned to Paris formally authorised by the composer to put *Aïda* on the stage, and that he at once set to work with the *mise en scène* and the preparations for the work. From the first the cast was thus arranged:—

Aïda	Mademoiselle Krauss.
Radamès	M. Sellier.
Amneris	Mademoiselle Bloch.
Amonasro	M. Maurel.
Ramfis	M. Boudouresque.
The King	M. Menu.

In the course of this volume I have avoided

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anything like critical reflections on the merit of the works of the master who is the last musical glory of Italy, and who for more than half a century has filled the whole world with his fame and his genius. I have been desirous of not transgressing the limits which I set myself, and have adhered strictly and voluntarily to the domain of anecdote. I shall become no more critical and æsthetic on the subject of *Aïda* than I have been elsewhere; but I may be permitted to reprint here the article which I devoted to a report of the performance at the Opera, with the object of giving an account of the impression produced in Paris by the production of the masterpiece on our great lyric stage. In default of other advantages, it possesses that of giving, with some interesting details, an exact testimony of that impression while vivid in the mind of the writer who gave it to the public :—

"At last we have that noble, beautiful, and lofty *Aïda*, which, after rather more than eight years of existence, finally belongs to the great French *répertoire*, in which it was so worthy to take its place; here it is at last acclimatised among us, after having triumphantly made the tour of Europe, and having been applauded previously on the Italian stage, which, unfortunately, we no longer possess. It would have

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been deplorable if, from a false sentiment of personal resentment and artistic egotism, our Opera had remained deprived of a work which, by its vigorous beauty, by its intensity of expression, by its heroic attractions, by its grand and magnificent qualities, had excited the admiration of the whole world. It has brought a new and very desirable addition to a *répertoire* somewhat restricted, which, since the production of *Le Prophète*, had not been increased by any work so finished and so vigorous. Works are rare which, like *Aïda*, join to power and wealth of inspiration a dramatic feeling pushed to its farthest limits, and the qualities of a style full of grandeur, of nobleness, and of majesty.

"The public, which, for its own part, has not, like artists, any fixed opinions, the public, which before everything is eclectic, without caring much to consider the nature of its sensations and impressions, and demands above all at the theatre the charm of emotion, waited for the production of *Aïda* with veritable impatience. The public was fully aware that the overwhelming quality of Verdi is dramatic feeling, that dramatic feeling so intense with him that he has from time to time too completely sacrificed to it considerations of form, of style, and of delicacy; they were aware that

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the composer of *Rigoletto* and of *La Traviata* was no trimmer, no adopter of half-measures; that, working for the theatre, he was before everything *of* the theatre; that he has the clearest foresight of what a dramatic situation requires, and that when he has seized the culminating point of this situation, he always finds in his heart and in his genius the accents which suit it, whether passionate, touching, pathetic, or terrible. The public knows this because it knows the grand passages of the composer's works, often unequal, but always powerful, because it has learned to admire episodes so moving, so passionate, as are the *Miserere* of *Il Trovatore* or the septet of *Ernani*, the quartet of *Rigoletto* or the finale of the second act of *La Traviata*. This is why the impatience for *Aïda* was so great, and why the public was prepared to be so sympathetic with this great work.

"Besides, the vast scale of the Opera and the well-known artistic taste of its present director promised the spectators enjoyment of a special order, and assured the work of surroundings worthy of it and of its subject. If it was difficult to get together, to represent the principal characters, a quartet as remarkable as that which had previously been offered at the Théâtre Italien in the person of Mesdames Stolz

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and Waldmann, of MM. Masini and Pandolfini, the Opera nevertheless brought forward two artists of the first rank, Mademoiselle Krauss and M. Maurel, who surpassed themselves, a young tenor, M. Sellier, whose progress is surprising, and as to the choral and instrumental departments, they presented a vigour and an *ensemble* which it is impossible to surpass. As to the scenic effect, it is well known what the Opera is in this respect, and never, we can affirm, has the Opera done better, more tastefully, nor more sumptuously than on this occasion. The subject of *Aïda* demands a scenic splendour and a theatric pomp which it is difficult to imagine, and it is certain that the marvellous surroundings which have been given to the work cause its grandeur and surprising beauty to stand out with increased strength. It will be sufficient to cite the second tableau of the second act. This scene is the work of M. J. B. Lavastre, and, with its immense avenue of gigantic sphinxes enveloped in the dusty light of a brilliant sun, represents one of the hundred gates of Thebes; when it saw the arrival, in this scene, of the brilliant cortège of Radamès, in costumes so rich, so varied, and so true, which an excellent artist, M. Eugène Lacoste, has designed and grouped with exquisite art, when it heard the splendid march

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given by the warlike trumpets, with marvellous effect, and subsequently accompanied by the military band, the whole house, seized with an outburst of surprise and enthusiasm, broke forth into a loud shout of admiration, and demanded it again with an irresistible voice. Then happened what perhaps had never been seen at the Opera: after a moment of very natural indecision, the stage was cleared in the twinkling of an eye, without confusion, without disorder; each one went to take his position out of view of the spectators, and the procession recommenced with the applause of the entire public.

"I am not proposing to write here an analysis of the score of *Aïda*, which was done in this journal some years since on the occasion of the production of the work at the Théâtre Italien. But, in speaking of the present performance, I must single out the pieces which produced the deepest impression at the Opera, or which seemed to me specially worthy of attention. But, before doing so, I will make this remark with regard to the importance of this score of *Aïda*, and to its superiority over the preceding works of the master. It has been said, and it has been repeated, that Verdi, in writing *Aïda*, had been preoccupied, and, as it were, haunted by the new musical pòetics and the ideas made

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current by M. Richard Wagner. I am absolutely convinced that M. Verdi, who is not only a great artist, but a man of superior intelligence, has kept himself well informed as to the efforts and the attempts of him who is called, somewhat kindly, as I think, the German reformer; but I am ready to be hanged if any one can find in the last score of the Italian master a single reflection, a single symptom, of that which is termed Wagnerism. The real truth, in my humble opinion, is that M. Verdi has above all undergone a French influence; that since the day when he wrote for us *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, a development, slow but progressive, has influenced his mind and his style; that this development, already shown in *Don Carlos*, has acquired its full and complete proportions in *Aïda*, which is, as it were, characteristic of the genius of its composer. Now the qualities which distinguish *Aïda* completely from its elder sisters are the following: on the one hand, the unity and the suppleness which the master has given to his inspiration in compelling it to obey him instead of obeying it himself; on the other, the majesty and the uniformity of style, the result of the effort just pointed out, and which gives to the work its colour, its grandeur, and its unity; in a word, not, as some have maintained, *science*, otherwise the excessive

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and exaggerated straining after novelty of harmony and orchestration, but that which is quite a different thing: a clear and accurate feeling of the necessities of harmony and orchestration applied to dramatic music. And, in fact, apart from a few slight negligences, we may say that in this respect the score of *Aïda* is much more careful than its forerunners; that its harmony is richer, fuller, and more varied; that the instrumentation is solid, shapely, and thoroughly in keeping, no longer presenting those gaps, those impracticable voids, or that whimsical and eccentric padding observable even in the most successful works of the master. But, I repeat, there is a great abyss between this and wishing to make of M. Verdi an imitator and a scholar of Wagner. The author of *Aïda* has not transformed, he has modified and completed himself; he has not worked a revolution in his style, but a simple development, a profound development, it is true, which is the fruit of the maturity of his genius, and reveals it in its fullest luxuriance.

"What is remarkable in the score of *Aïda*, having regard to the effect produced on the listener, is the continuous progression of the work, the noble and powerful beauty of which becomes more and more impressive as it unfolds. The first act, apparently somewhat cold, sets

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out the action with rare firmness, without bringing this or that episode into prominence; with the second, the plot is delineated, the local colour is brightened, the outlines are sharpened, and the superb scene of the return of Radamès, with the finale to which it gives place, causes a kind of heroic thrill to pass through the spectator; the third act brings us into the realm of the tenderest pathos, the most intense passion, with the two duets and the trio which furnished the musician with the opportunity of an outburst of such warmth and of such dramatic power; finally, in the fourth act, the superb scene of the sentence of Radamès, so unexpected and so striking, and the duet of the two lovers, shut up in the cave where they were to perish, are truly magnificent passages, which carry the power of expression and the feeling of scenic and musical grandeur to the greatest height. The listener, during these four acts, has, so to speak, not a moment of respite, and from sensation to sensation he reaches the culminating point of emotion. This is one of the secrets of the power of this bold, masculine, and vigorous work.

"As to the interpretation of *Aïda*, Mademoiselle Krauss must be pronounced equal to the occasion, for assuredly she has here found her most brilliant creation, and has surpassed the hopes

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of her admirers. Never has this powerful artist reached such a point of inspiration; never has she produced accents more noble or more pathetic; never has she shown herself more perfect or more worthy of the great renown which she has gained. After having sung with a rare largeness of style the difficult and somewhat ungrateful air of the first act, after having won applause in the two duets with Radamès and Amneris, she obtained in the third, in company with M. Maurel, one of the most prodigious successes which the history of the theatre can report. This act set match to powder, for everything in it succeeded; the dramatic situation, the splendour of the musical inspiration, the excellence of the interpretation, all these, joined to scenery of incomparable beauty, combined to make one of the most striking, one of the most admirable spectacles that can be imagined.

"At the very first the public gave vent to a murmur of astonishment and pleasure when the curtain rose on the admirable landscape of M. Chéret. This sweet and melancholy landscape, succeeding the majestic and sunny scene of the entry to the town of Thebes, represents a view of the banks of the Nile by moonlight, and reproduces, it seems, faithfully, one of the most poetic sites of the island of

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Philæ; one would call it an exquisite canvas of Marilhat or of Fromentin taken down from its frame and arranged for exhibition by some new optical contrivance.

"Amidst these surroundings, impressed with a sweet poetry, unfolds one of the most powerful and most dramatic scenes of the drama. The captive king, Amonasro, who had been conquered by the Egyptians, has sworn to be avenged of them, although, on the prayer of Radamès, his conqueror, liberty has been restored to him. He knows that his daughter Aïda loves Radamès, that she is loved by him, and he wishes to induce her to undertake to betray her country and to make known the secrets of the Egyptians. Aïda at first resists these demands, but her father insists with anger, and, under the influence of terror, she finally yields. This scene, extremely dramatic, treated by the musician with consummate art, gives place to a duet, of a beauty, of a vigour, of a power of expression, which are incomparable, and this duet was played, sung, and declaimed in a truly admirable manner by Mademoiselle Krauss and M. Maurel. The first of these with her pathetic and heart-breaking expression, the latter with his wild and savage accent, provoked twenty recalls, by a rendering full of fire and passion, and called

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forth shouts and applause after each phrase from a breathless and enthusiastic audience. It was not a success, but a real triumph, for the two great artists, who rendered so happily the thought of the inspired master.

"The impression produced by the fourth act was no less deep. In it again we are brought face to face with two grand dramatic situations: one is the scene of the trial of Radamès, accused of treason, among the most striking certainly which exist on the stage; the judges cross the stage to go to the tribunal, which is invisible to the public; but the details of the sitting, the questions of the judges, are audible from afar, while Amneris, who loves Radamès, and who is partly the cause of his ruin, remains alone in terror, and demonstrates by her groans the whole of this strangely moving episode. The second scene is the last of the work. Radamès has been condemned to die in a dungeon, which they brick up over him, in which Aïda, who had foreseen the sentence, is waiting to share his fate. The duet which the two lovers sing at this supreme hour is worthy of the finest models which the lyric stage offers; it is a passage of the highest order, and closes worthily, in a pathetic transport impressed with noble grief, this grand and masterly work.

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"I have already said that the *ensemble* of the concerted piece was superb and irreproachable. The orchestra, at the head of which, by an interference with the custom of the Opera, M. Verdi was placed, performed veritable prodigies as regards expression of light and shade and symphonic contrasts. The chorus, on their part, sang with a precision, a power, and a firmness which cannot be too highly praised. I will say as much for the artists of the ballet, although the way the *divertissement* is arranged is not much to my taste. I have praised, as was fitting, two of the most beautiful scenes; but I wish at the same time to point out the others, which are the productions of the brush of MM. Daran, Rubé, and Chaperon, Lavastre *aîné* and Carpezat. Finally, I cannot sufficiently congratulate M. Eugène Lacoste, whose exquisite taste, detailed care, and rich imagination have recalled to life in a harmonious whole the costumes of splendid materials and of rich colour belonging to a civilisation which exists no longer."[1]

It was on the 22nd March, 1880, that the first performance of *Aïda*, with the French poem of MM. Camille du Locle and Charles Nuitter, took place at the Opera. We have just seen how great was its success. The Parisian

[1] *Journal Officiel* of the 31st March, 1880.

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public received both work and author with enthusiastic sympathy. As to the Italians present in Paris—and we know that they form a numerous colony—they were very careful not to let slip this opportunity—and a very natural one—of testifying to their fellow-countryman the admiration which they felt for his glory and for his genius. They wished to celebrate by a double memento the triumph which he had just obtained, and the master found himself the object at their hands of a manifestation which a newspaper reports in these terms :—

"It appears that it is to-day" (March 29th) "that this artistic and patriotic celebration has taken place.

"A crown of gold, composed of two branches of laurel, tied together by a graceful knot (also of gold), on which are inscribed the principal works of Verdi—*Ernani*, *I Lombardi*, *Il Trovatore*, *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, *Aïda*—has been already handed to him at the Hôtel de Bade, in the presence of MM. Vaucorbeil and Cherouvrier,[1] by the delegates of the colony, MM. le Baron de Koepff, Cavaglion, Bosoni, and a fourth, . . . whose name my memory refuses to recall.

"This superb crown of gold rests on a velvet

[1] M. Cherouvrier, a distinguished composer, was the secretary-general of the administration of the Opera.

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stand, bearing an Egyptian cartouch, engraved with these words :—

'AL MAESTRO VERDI
LA COLONIA ITALIANA DI PARIGI.
"AIDA," MARZO, 1880.'

An elegant album, enclosing the list of the donors, accompanies this object of art. It is entirely of velvet, with symbolical mountings of silver, containing a leaf attached by tricoloured ribbons, French and Italian. Among the names inscribed on the list, the following appear : General Cialdini, Count Camondo, Cernuschi, Delle Sedie, Baron Lanzirotti, Bixio, Conegliano, Caponi, Fontana, J. de Filippi, Lucantoni, Sighicelli, Vio-Bonato, Pasini, Peruzzi, De Nittis."[1]

Nor was this all. At the same time Verdi and also his wife were invited to the table of M. Grévy, President of the Republic, where he found himself in the company of several great personages of the official and artistic world : M. Jules Ferry, President of the Council of Ministers, M. Vaucorbeil, director of the Opera, M. Bonnat, the celebrated painter, M. Emile Perrin, *administrateur-général* of the Comédie Française, M. Edmund Turquet, deputy, etc., etc. ; and on this occasion M. Grévy announced to the composer of *Aïda* that, on the proposi-

[1] *Figaro* of the 30th March, 1880.

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tion of M. Ferry, the Council of Ministers had voted unanimously his nomination to the rank of *grand officier* of the Legion of Honour. He personally handed him the decoration.

The success of *Aïda* was neither a surprise nor a flash in the pan. The work, thanks to its great excellence, has taken its place triumphantly and definitely in the *répertoire*, unfortunately too restricted, of our Opera, and on the 15th October, 1884, four years and a half after its production at the theatre, the hundredth performance of it was given.[1]

[1] Since that time, on the 27th February, 1885, *Rigoletto* has also taken its place in the *répertoire* of our French opera. The work was played by Mademoiselles Krauss (Gilda) and Richard (Madeleine), MM. Lasalle (Rigoletto), Dereims (the Duke), and Boudouresque (Sparafucile). At once informed of the public success of the work, Verdi addressed to the directors of the Opera, MM. Ritt and Gailhard, the following telegram :—"I send my sincerest congratulations to the trusty performers of *Rigoletto*, to the eminent directors of the Opera at Paris, to the chorus and orchestra who contributed to its success on Friday night.—VERDI."

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CHAPTER XIII.

A self-satisfied composer.—Signor Vincenzo Sassaroli.—A novel kind of wager and challenge.—"You are afraid."—Nothing comes of it.

I HAVE said that I had to relate a curious incident having reference at the same time to *Aïda* and to the *Requiem* Mass. If this incident had in the least degree a serious side to it, it would certainly form one of the most interesting chapters of the inner history of music of our time. Such as it is, it none the less deserves to be related, and cannot fail to be amusing.

There was once upon a time a musician who answered to the name of Vincenzo Sassaroli, to whom the little town of Tolentino had had the good fortune to give birth; he was a nephew, and for a short time a pupil, of Mercadante, and at the same time organist, professor, and composer. Having written a Mass for full orchestra, and a *Tantum Ergo* performed at Orvieto, this musician brought out in 1872, at Genoa, at the Teatro Doria, an opera entitled *Riccardo, Duca di York*, of which he wrote the

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words and the music. This did not prevent the above-named work from making an honourable *fiasco*. He had also perpetrated a comic opera, *Santa Lucia*, which, I think, has not as yet been offered to the public.

M. Sassaroli, whose bad opinion of others did not prevent his being filled with admiration for his own genius, had been singularly provoked by the enthusiastic reception given by his fellow-countrymen to the Mass of Verdi, which was considered by him as a work ill-constructed and out of keeping. However, he was fain to champ his bit in silence, and contented himself with informing some of his friends of the disdain he felt for so paltry a production, when the success made by the score of *Aïda* had the effect of making him quite beside himself, and compelled him to make a bellicose demonstration. Taking his best pen, and dipping it in his finest ink, Signor Sassaroli flung "as a glove of defiance" (it is his own expression) the following letter in the face of Signor Verdi and of his publisher, Signor Ricordi, which he posted to the address of the latter, taking care to register it, in order that it should not be lost on the way :—

GENOA, *January 3rd*, 1876.

DEAR SIR,—After some consideration, I decided also to go and hear *Aïda*, an opera which I had already

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read through; and the object of this present letter is not to inform you of the opinion which I formed either in reading it, or in hearing it; all I desire is to beg you to give the greatest attention to what I am about to say to you.

I ask your permission (supposing that the above-mentioned opera is your own property) to put to music, on my own account, the libretto of *Aïda*. Mention this to the *maestro* Verdi, and see if he consents to submit to comparison with me. I am ready to set to work on the following conditions :—

The opera shall be written to the same libretto, without adding anything, without the smallest abridgment, without the slightest change whatever.

The music shall be written in the space of one year, to be reckoned from the acceptance of these proposals.

For the work shall be paid twenty thousand francs, that is to say five thousand francs at the time of the despatch of each act.

These sums shall be consigned to the hands of a third person, agreed on by both, until the completion of the opera, which shall be judged by a jury composed of three *maestri* chosen by myself, of three chosen by Verdi, and of one chosen by the six combined.

As I should find myself compelled to abandon my lessons for the space of a year in order to execute this agreement, there shall be deducted from the aforesaid sum an allowance sufficient to enable me to live without occupying myself otherwise.

If the work is judged unfavourably, the money shall be withdrawn by the depositor, less the above-mentioned deduction.

It shall be permitted to me to associate in my work

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some of my pupils, who will furnish the less important pieces of the opera; but in case of any objection I will do the whole.

As you will perceive, it is a challenge which I throw to Verdi, and to you his publisher, and I shall see what answer you give.

In this contest, the sole risk you run consists in the deduction specified above, which, however, I should be able to guarantee you.

I shall see, on the other hand, if, with all these proposals, you will let slip the opportunity of crushing me and of silencing me once and for ever, so as to be able to cry out triumphantly :—"Our telegrams from Cairo, from Paris, and from Naples, which proclaimed Verdi invincible, were all spontaneous, and nothing was got up by us."

I seize the occasion, etc.

VINCENZO SASSAROLI.

As we see, the arrangement was very simple, and the offer truly tempting. M. Sassaroli gave a challenge to Verdi and to his publisher, and as he did not wish to risk anything by this proposition, he laid down himself the conditions of his wager, arranging in such a way that, losing or gaining, in either case he left the expenses of the trial to the charge of the adversaries whom he provoked. It was impossible to be more accommodating or more prudent.

Will it be believed, however? Signor Ricordi declined so ingenious an arrangement,

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and contented himself with publishing in his journal, *La Gazzetta Musicale,* the letter of the *maestro* Sassaroli, with the accompaniment of a few harmless jokes. But this did not suit the corrector of Verdi, who began to get warm; and dipping again his good pen of Toledo in his most limpid ink, addressed to his enemy, again registered, the following missive :—

DEAR SIR,—I have seen printed in your *Gazzetta Musicale,* under the heading of "Facetiæ," a letter of mine which I addressed to you recently.

In that letter I gave you a challenge, you and the *maestro* Verdi, on the subject of *Aïda.* And the object of the challenge was to prove to the world of art that this opera could be set much better than it has been, and I decided to give this challenge as I found mercenary journalism characterising *Aïda* as not only the masterpiece of Verdi, but also as a work which marks an immense progress in the field of art.

I, who have always cultivated, and who still cultivate, art with passion, and who consecrate all my efforts to defend it against anything which in my opinion may be hurtful to it, have not been able to bear patiently the holding up to the admiration of artists and people of taste a work towards which indulgence is shown in thinking it moderately good, and which is at least inferior to nearly all the preceding works of the illustrious *maestro.* You looked on my invitation as a jest, and, partly to hurt my feelings, thought fit to insert my letter for the purpose of exciting smiles.

But you must know that when I am pleased to joke,

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I look out for persons more suitable for this amusement than you or the *maestro* Verdi; and you must know, besides, that when it is a question of putting an obstacle in the way of the corruption of art, I do not understand doing so by a joke. However, I am justified in believing, from your way of proceeding, that I have succeeded in making you take the challenge in question seriously, and that from the simple reason that you are afraid of it.

Afraid, because it is no more a question of appealing to the judgment of a public among whom may be found interested people who are urged to maintain that which it is thought convenient to maintain.

Afraid, because mercenary journalism would be unable, under the conditions arranged by me, to exercise any influence on the verdict.

Afraid, because judgment would be given by a company of *maestri* who could not be fascinated or hoodwinked either by long trumpets, or by double scenes, or by little negroes, or by chariots, or by oxen led in triumph, or by telegrams, or by Cairo, or by the Khedive, or by the sceptre.

Afraid, because the *maestri* chosen would, in their wisdom, give their decision from the point of view of art and taste, and according to the imperishable principles of the beautiful.

Afraid, because the only thing discussed would be a reputation which up to the present time, by the force of cabal, it has been desirable to look upon as unassailable.

Fears all justified by the fact that it has not been the first time that the music of the *maestro* Verdi has been put in comparison with mine; and have a care of the

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invulnerability of the composer of *Aïda* if the comparison proposed by me has on this occasion the result which it had the first time! It is true that then there was no challenge; but it is also true that Signor Verdi is not the only *maestro* who knows how to put two notes together, as they try to make out now; I will add further, that (if he have succeeded, which is quite open to question) Signor Verdi will not be the first who, with *Aïda*, has accomplished the fusion of the Italian with the German school: for in 1846, at the time when Verdi pursued the system of *cabalettas* (as he has always done), criticism had already given me that praise, after hearing my first two scores. The truth is that I did not allow myself to be deceived and puffed up by these praises, which perhaps were due rather to a wish to encourage a youth (as I was then) than because the matter was really as stated. So true it is that these two scores were by me withdrawn from the hands of the publisher Giovanni Ricordi,[1] and that at present they no longer exist.

Are all these jokes, Signor Tito Ricordi? Think well of it, and if they are jokes, begin to laugh, always bearing in mind, however, that he laughs best who laughs last; this is a proverb, and proverbs are the wisdom of nations.

But if they are not jokes, think well before calling jokes things which are more serious than you fancy.

Enough dust has been thrown into the eyes of the foolish; henceforth a little free examination in art can certainly do no harm. Your infallible Verdi, and you his omnipotent publisher, have been defied by a man

[1] The publisher Giovanni Ricordi was, we have already seen, the father of the present publisher M. Tito Ricordi.

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who can do nothing, and you have answered with a laugh,—a sufficient answer, I repeat, to make it obvious that you are afraid.

Many will say that instead of fear, it is the sum of twenty thousand francs demanded in payment of the work I proposed to write which prevents your accepting the challenge. But to these I will observe, that for a man like you such a sum is a trifle; further, that you have paid much more dearly for works which sleep, and will sleep, an eternal slumber. I will say still further—and this is the strongest reason—I asked this sum because precisely four years since, in the month of October, 1871, I offered you gratis, through the illustrious *maestro* Alberto Mazzucato, two operas, one semi-serious and one comic, on the single condition that you should assist me in obtaining their performance; and you generously refused; . . . therefore I could not offer myself gratis, fearing that a second refusal would result. And I think that all these circumstances are sufficient reasons to justify the demand of a sum for my remuneration.

One last word. I hope that, with the impartiality which I credit you with, you will print the second letter, as you have printed the first; and if you do not wish me to say that it is in truth a cursed fear which has taken hold of you, you will not print it under the heading of "Facetiæ."

However, do as you will, for the heading in no way changes the contents.

Your very devoted

VINCENZO SASSAROLI.

M. Sassaroli, who, as we see, is verbose, did

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not content himself with sending these letters to M. Ricordi ; he made this question the subject of a pamphlet of forty pages, which he published under the modest title : *Considerations on the Actual State of Musical Art in Italy, and on the Artistic Importance of the Opera "Aïda" and of the Mass of Verdi, by the Maestro Sassaroli, with the Two Challenges sent by him to the Publisher Tito Ricordi and to the Maestro Giuseppe Verdi, and refused by them.*[1]

In this pamphlet he reprinted his letters, and addressing Verdi personally, informed him, without circumlocution, that his Mass was inferior to a great number of the Masses of Mercadante, Pacini, and Ricci, and defied him also on the ground of religious music, making himself out strong enough to vanquish him at all points.

Why did not Verdi reply to all this? Was it, in fact, fear which made him mute? *Chi lo sa?* As to Sassaroli, he maintained the quiet of his strength to the end, and his dignity was not ruffled for an instant. Let us judge by these lines, which wind up the pamphlet the title of which I have just had so much trouble in transcribing :—

"It has been telegraphed to me from Milan

[1] Genoa, 1876, 8vo.

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that M. Ricordi has also printed my second letter, but I am not informed if with or without comment. At the moment of going to press I have not yet received *La Gazzetta.* However, I think it advisable to remark that whatever may be the comments which the very worthy editor may have added to my communication, they will remain without reply unless the said comments imply the acceptance of the challenge proposed by me on one, or even on both the two fields of battle—the theatrical and the religious. I have descended into the arena, and wait in quietness."

The last phrase has all the grandeur, the nobleness, and the severity of the antique. We may imagine one of those ancient Roman gladiators, awaiting stoically, in the middle of the amphitheatre, the savage (?) beasts which he is condemned to combat.

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CHAPTER XIV.

The man underlying the artist.—Verdi at Sant'-Agata.—His retired life.—Employment of his time.—Agriculturist, breeder of stock, companion.—Recollections.

FROM all that has gone before, the reader has been able to gather how brilliantly the career of the author of *Rigoletto* and of *Aïda* has developed, and the series of compositions by which the humble son of the *locandiere* of Le Roncole has achieved honours, glory, and fortune. Few great artists have risen from a lower rank, and have raised themselves to a higher. Whatever opinion one may hold as to the genius and artistic nature of Verdi, one fact is not open to question: that he is virtually the successor of the last great master of Italy, and that none among his fellow-countrymen and his contemporaries have been able to equal, or even to approach him. For a period of forty years he has reigned as a sovereign over the peninsula, and not only has he known no rival, but up to the present time nothing has led us to suppose that any younger artist will be worthy to gather up the

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heritage of glory which he himself received from the hands of his seniors.

But now I am about to leave the musician for a short time to return to the man.

Verdi, who before everything loves the country of his birth, and especially his native place, generally passes the winter at Genoa, where he inhabits, I believe, the Palazzo Doria; but every summer, without exception, he is to be found at his splendid estate of Sant'-Agata, situated near the little town of Busseto, where he passed his studious and reflective youth. His *collaborateur*, M. Ghislanzoni, one of the authors of the libretto of *Aïda*, has given a very interesting description of this abode of the great artist; I borrow the following details from him :—

"The villa of Sant'-Agata is distant about two miles from Busseto, and is almost isolated in the midst of a vast plain. The church, which bears the name of the saint, and two or three villagers' houses form the surroundings of the luxurious and elegant dwelling of the master.

"Nature has shed no charm on this neighbourhood. The plain is monotonous, and covered only with those natural riches which, although the joy of the husbandman, offer no inspiration to the poet. In the midst of those

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long rows of poplars which fringe a ditch without water, the eye remains surprised, and almost saddened by the sight of two weeping willows leaning against a gate. These two enormous trees, which, perhaps, elsewhere might not produce so deep an impression, here strike the mind as an exotic vision. The person who had these trees planted must have had nothing in common, as far as regards character and habits of life, with the population of the vast plain which you have passed through. The inhabitant of the house which you get a glimpse of at a short distance must be an eccentric person—an artist, a poet, a thinker, perhaps even a misanthrope. To reach the door you must cross a bridge, the only means of communication which connects the residence of the artist with that of other living people. Those who know the inhabitant of this house, as they draw near to it at eventide, can fancy they hear, sighing among the branches of these melancholy trees, the funeral hymn of *Trovatore*, or the last wail of a dying Violetta.

"If this is the abode of genius, you will naturally understand that it is the genius of grief, the genius of strong and powerful passions. A thick belt of trees conceals the house on the side of the high-road from the sight of the inquisitive, whilst on the opposite side the

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bright and pleasant garden descends to the banks of a small artificial lake. We may be permitted, however, to suppose that in the course of years, when the new plantations have grown up, gloom and sadness will completely overshadow this habitation.

"Beyond the garden, crossed by a long avenue, in which the eye loses itself, spread the vast possessions of the master, scattered with the houses of the country people, with small, well-built farms. The farming shows that perfection which is learned in foreign countries less favoured by nature. All the advancement of agricultural science in England and France has been utilised by the keen-sighted intelligence of Verdi for the benefit of this locality. Whilst the willows of the garden, the thick trees, the sombre arbours, and the winding and melancholy lake display the passionate nature of the artist, the agriculture and this fruitful country seem, on the contrary, to reflect the well-regulated mind of the man, that practical and absolute good sense which in Verdi is found united with an exuberant fancy and a vivacious and irritable temperament.

"This practical and absolute good sense shows itself more than ever in the architecture of the house, in the choice of furniture, in everything which has to do with the comfort and inward

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order of the family. There exists but one word, *a musical* word, which is capable of expressing this marvellous order, this happy alliance of art with the material necessities of life—it is the word *harmony*. The most exquisite taste and the most learned forethought have presided over its construction. Here everything is beautiful, everything is elegant and simple; but what is of much more importance, everything answers to the requirements of health, convenience, and comfort.

"The master generally composes in his bedroom—a room situated on the ground floor, spacious, airy, and light, furnished with artistic profusion. The windows and the doors, also glazed, look out on the garden. In it are a magnificent pianoforte, a bookcase, and an enormous piece of furniture of eccentric shape, which divides the room into two parts, and exhibits a delightful variety of statuettes, vases, and artistic fancies. Above the piano is placed the portrait in oils of the aged Barezzi, the protector of Verdi, who professes for his venerable friend a kind of worship. . . . From this room, in the silence of the night, arise the exciting harmonies which spring out of the creative brain. Here was written *Don Carlos*, and this colossal work, which may be put in rivalry with the greatest compositions of the

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French lyric stage, was completed in the space of six months.

"In one of the upper rooms I was shown the first piano which replaced the meagre spinet already described. . . . It was near to this piano that I heard related piquant anecdotes with regard to the first dramatic compositions of the illustrious master, which contradict many of the current accounts. . . .

"The *maestro* Verdi is at present fifty-five years of age.[1] Tall in figure, active, vigorous, endowed with an iron constitution and with great energy of character, his vitality seems inexhaustible. Twenty years ago, when I saw him for the first time, his general appearance presented alarming symptoms. While at that time the thinness of his limbs, the pallor of his face, the hollowness of his cheeks, and the rings around his eyes, gave rise to sinister forebodings, at present nothing can be traced in his general aspect but the health and strength of a man destined for a long career.

"And, as with his person, his mind and character seem equally to have undergone favourable modifications. No one could be more open to impressions, more cordial, or more expansive. What a difference between my taciturn messmate of the year 1846 and my vivacious and

[1] This was written in 1868.

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at times astonishingly gay host of the year 1868! I have known artists who, after having been in youth negligently prodigal of good humour and affability, later, under the varnish of glory and honours, have become sombre and almost unapproachable. One would say that Verdi, passing through a career of triumphs, on the contrary, left at each step of his career a part of that hard and rough bark which encased him in the years of his youth.

"The villa of Sant'-Agata is still the favourite dwelling-place of the *maestro* Verdi. Here his prodigious activity of body and mind can find vent more freely than elsewhere. At five o'clock in the morning he walks through the park, visits the fields and the farms, amuses himself in rowing on the lake in a little boat, which he manages like a skilful waterman. Not a moment of respite. As a rest from music, Verdi has recourse to poetry; to temper the strong emotions of the latter and the former he takes refuge in the history of philosophy. There is no side of human knowledge into which his restless mind, greedy of culture, does not throw itself with transport."[1]

To these very interesting details I will add a short account of the existence which Verdi leads at his estate of Sant'-Agata, which is become, in

[1] *Reminiscenze Artistiche*, by A. Ghislanzoni.

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fact, a sort of model farm, thanks to the enlargements made to it and the remarkable care the master takes in his agricultural pursuits.

At Sant'-Agata Verdi rises regularly, as we have seen, at five o'clock in the morning. After having taken the classic cup of coffee without milk, the use of which is general in the middle and upper parts of Italy, he goes out and walks in his magnificent garden. There he visits his plantations, examines the work executed in accordance with his orders, and gives instructions to his gardener. His second visit is to the stables and paddock, for Verdi is a regular breeder of horses; he has a whole troop of them, which he tends according to all the rules of horse-breeding science, and he takes pleasure in admiring the beauty of the offspring of the Verdi breed. Whilst he is passing in review his colts and his mares the first stroke of the bell recalls him to the house to take a frugal meal with his wife, in which coffee with milk forms the principal portion. At half-past ten another stroke of the bell announces a more substantial repast, which sometimes is followed by a game of billiards or a walk.

At two o'clock the postman comes; it is the most interesting moment of these days, so calm, so amazingly quiet, that moment when the

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hermitage daily renews the ties which bind it to the world; then arrive letters, newspapers, proposals, requests, and tributes of admiration of all kinds and from all countries. At this time, for example, it was that for the first time the pressing demand for permission to perform *Aïda* at the Opera reached him, which at first drew from him this exclamation: "Good God! even at Sant'-Agata one cannot live quietly!" The afternoon is passed in reading, in writing, sometimes in riding, till the hour of dinner, say five o'clock in summer and six in winter. In the summer the ride takes place after dinner. Then, when once at home again, the evening is passed in conversation, sometimes in a game at cards. But at ten o'clock Verdi gives the signal for bed, and every one retires. At Genoa the daily life offers no great difference, with the exception that long walks to Acquasola replace those which the master usually takes in his garden.

Verdi is, it is said, adored at Busseto, where they are proud of him, and where they benefit in different ways by his presence. His modesty allows no one to know the pensions, the gifts, the assistance of all kinds which he distributes, his donations to philanthropic institutions; all this is done either by the care of his wife or under the cover of anonymity; they only specify

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the large and regular charitable distributions which he makes at Sant'-Agata. Some of the work in his beautiful garden, which seems the act of the caprice of a *dilettante*, has been undertaken with the simple aim of giving work to poor labourers who were wanting it.

Although in principle he was opposed to the project, Verdi nevertheless contributed generously to the cost of constructing the theatre at Busseto. The inhabitants of that town had got it into their heads—in what way is not known—that he had promised to write an opera and to make them a present of it in order that the proceeds should enable them to build this theatre. It is needless to say that this was entirely untrue. Verdi gave no less than ten thousand francs (£400 sterling) towards the construction of the theatre, to which they gave his name. It is a small, graceful, elegant building, on the façade of which is the inscription, in letters of gold: TEATRO VERDI.[1]

[1] Not long ago Busseto possessed another theatre, now destroyed. The old people of the neighbourhood remember seeing performed there not only *Il Barbiere* and *La Cenerentola* of Rossini, but also Paër's *Camilla*, as well as the comic operas of Provesi, of which we have spoken above. Madame Ristori, when a young girl, appeared here at the time when she was a member of one of those wandering companies which are always so numerous in Italy. Verdi remembers having seen her here. Neither of them at that time anticipated for a moment that glory would bring them to the front, and when, many years after, they met, they recalled to each other's recollection this period of their youth.

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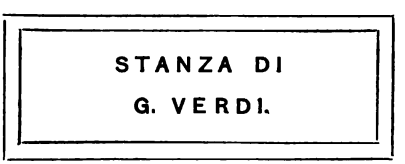
Among the recollections relating to Verdi which are preserved at Busseto, one of the most interesting is found in the house of Barezzi. It will be remembered that it is with this worthy man that Verdi dwelt during the time he was at Busseto, that is to say up to 1849, the time of his first acquisition of Sant'-Agata, which was then but a poor place. M. Demetrio Barezzi, who succeeded his father in carrying on his business, has preserved the room just as it was then, and shows it with pride to all those who express a desire to see it. On the door of the room which Verdi occupied may be seen a little tablet framed in black, on which is the inscription, written by the hand of the composer himself:



It was in this room that Verdi wrote the greater part of his early works, and among others, in 1844, *I Due Foscari.*

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CHAPTER XV.

A few of Verdi's letters.—Artistic character of the master.—His opinions and doctrines in relation to art, the theatre, and musical education. —Portrait of Verdi by Guerazzi.

As far as lies in my power, I have given all the details of the career of Verdi—that career which began obscurely with *Oberto di San Bonifacio*, and ended, thirty-one years later, with that masterpiece which is called *Aïda*. I have endeavoured, in the course of this work, to unite the man and the artist, and to bring into relief his character at the same time as his genius. If I have, of set purpose, almost completely abstained from criticism—that is to say, from all attempts at discussing his merits—and if I have wished to make the work impersonal, I have not pretended to make it the work of a sceptic. Without having at any time entered into discussion, I have at least allowed my impressions, whether from an artistic or a moral point of view, to peep through. I have no intention of altering my plan, but I wish to add here some information which will complete our personal acquaintance

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with Verdi, and will also put the finishing touches to his portrait as an artist. A few of the master's letters will be of assistance in this conclusion of my task. These letters are very few; for while some artists are always anxious to be writing, and delight to see themselves in print, Verdi has shown an equal determination to avoid all such occasions. To the extent to which the former show themselves greedy of publicity, always ready to bring themselves before the multitude, seeking notoriety, putting themselves on show, organising around them a clattering *mise en scène*, to the same extent does he avoid putting himself in evidence and occupying the attention of the public. If it fell to his lot occasionally to direct the execution of his own works, it was only just when these works were new, when he was strongly urged to do so, and also not too openly to break through an old custom of his country—a custom, however, which begins to pass away there, while with us it is taking root in rather a ridiculous fashion. In every case, having very clear feelings of dignity, he absolutely refused to make an exhibition of himself, considering it, very justly, more inconvenient than advantageous. We find the expression of this sentiment in the following letter, which the master addressed, ten years back, to the ex-

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cellent composer Carlo Pedrotti, the composer of the pretty opera *Tutti in Maschera*, who was then conductor of the Teatro Victor-Emmanuele of Turin :—

GENOA, *January 1st*, 1875.

DEAR MAESTRO PEDROTTI,—I learn from a letter which I read in the papers that they wish to get me to Turin, in order to invite me to be present at a performance of *Aïda*. Supposing that there may be some truth in this, and hoping that it is in your power to prevent the despatch of this letter, I beg you to be good enough to do so, in order that I may thus be spared the unpleasantness of replying with a refusal to so courteous an invitation.

You will understand, dear *maestro*, that I can, and perhaps even that I ought to, present myself to the public when I write, or when I assume the responsibility of the execution of one of my operas; but that is not the case in this instance. For what purpose should I go to Turin? I should go with the sole object of exhibiting myself—of making myself *claquer*.[1] No! That has never been one of my practices, even when I was at the beginning of my career! Judge if I could and should do so now! Manage, then, I beg of you, to persuade these gentlemen to renounce such a project, assuring them at the same time that it is impossible to be more sensible than I am of the esteem which they desire to manifest for me in person.

Have the kindness to send me a word in reply on this matter, and believe me,

Your very affectionate G. VERDI.

[1] In French in the original.

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With the same object, and almost in the same terms, Verdi again wrote last year to the president of the commission of the new theatre of Padua, a theatre to be named after him, but at the inauguration of which he declined to be present, in spite of the invitation to that effect which had been addressed to him :—

BUSSETO, SANT'-AGATA, *June 6th*, 1884.

MR. PRESIDENT,—I have already had the honour of telling you on one occasion, I repeated it by word of mouth to the excellent architect Sfondrini, and I am deeply grieved to have to repeat to yourself, for the last time on this occasion, that I am unable to go to Padua for the opening of the new theatre. Everything opposes it—my age, my health, and still more than everything else, my inclination. Just tell me, Mr. President, what should I do there? Show myself? Seek applause? That cannot be. I ought in truth to go and thank you for the honour which has been done to me; but I trust that you will be good enough to accept, although only in writing, these thanks, which I address to you with the deepest, the liveliest, and the most sincere gratitude.

With them, accept therefore, Mr. President, my excuses, and be good enough to believe me

Your very devoted

G. VERDI.

For the reasons given above, the letters of Verdi in print are extremely few. Here is one, however, very curious and interesting, on

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account of its being a complete declaration of artistic principles, and still more, a sort of general code for the direction which should be given to the studies of young musicians.

The patriarch of Italian composers, the venerable and illustrious Mercadante, died on the 17th December, 1870, leaving vacant the post of Director of the Conservatoire at Naples, where, during the last two centuries, so many artists who became famous had been brought up. To fill his place they at once cast eyes on Verdi; it was hoped that he would become the successor of the old master. The venerable archivist of the Conservatoire, Signor Francesco Florimo, was charged by his colleagues and brethren to approach the composer of *La Traviata* and of *Rigoletto* with this object. Verdi replied in the following letter, which was published by the *Pungolo* of Naples, and reprinted subsequently in several journals, among others in the *Gazzetta Musicale* of Milan:—

GENOA, *January 7th*, 1871.

DEAR FLORIMO,—If there is one thing which could flatter my self-esteem, it is in truth the invitation which through you the professors of the Conservatoire of Naples, and so many artists of that city, have addressed to me, begging me to accept the direction of that establishment. It is very painful to me not to be able to reply as I would to this mark of confidence;

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but with my occupations, with my habits, with my love of an independent life, it would be impossible for me to undertake so serious a duty. You will say, "What about art?" Well, I have done what I could; and if from time to time I may be able to do something else, it is necessary that I should be free from all preoccupation. If this were not the case, you may fancy how proud I should be to accept this post, which has been filled by the founders of a school—A. Scarlatti, and subsequently Durante and Leo. It would have become a matter of pride to me (if at present it were not a regret) to train the pupils in the grave and severe studies of these early fathers.

I should have wished, so to speak, to put one foot on the past, and the other on the present and the future, for the *music of the future* raises no fear in me. I should have said to the young pupils: "Practise yourselves in fugue constantly, obstinately, even to satiety, until your hand becomes free enough and strong enough to mould the notes to your will. Accustom yourselves also to compose with certainty, to lay out the parts well, and to modulate without affectation; study Palestrina and some of his contemporaries, then jump to Marcello, and give your attention especially to recitative; listen to a few performances of modern operas without allowing yourself to be dazzled either by the numerous beauties of harmony and orchestration, or by the chord of the *diminished seventh*, the rock and the refuge of those who are unable to write four bars without using half a dozen of these *sevenths*."

These studies completed, joined to a thorough literary culture, I should then say to these young people: "Now, put your hand upon your heart, write, and

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(granted an artistic organisation) you will be composers. At any rate, you will not increase the rabble of copyists, and of unhealthy folk of our time, who seek, seek, and never find." In singing also, I should have desired the study of the ancients, united to modern declamation.

To put in practice these few maxims, so easy in appearance, it would be necessary to superintend the teaching with so much assiduity, that the twelve months of the year would far from suffice. I who have in this place house, interests, fortune, everything—I ask you, How could I take this step?

Be kind enough, therefore, my dear Florimo, to be the interpreter to your colleagues, and to the large number of the musicians of your beautiful Naples, of the great regret which I experience in not being able to accept an invitation so honourable to me. I hope that you will find a man *above all things learned and rigorous in studies.* Licence and errors of counterpoint may be allowed, and are sometimes even beautiful, at the theatre; in a conservatoire—never.

Return to the antique, and it will be an advance.

Adieu, adieu! Believe me always,

Your affectionate

G. VERDI.

The following letter shows again the interest which Verdi takes in all musical questions. It was addressed by him to the president of a commission recently formed in Italy by the competent minister for the reform of the pitch and the adoption of a "diapason normal:"—

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GENOA, *February 10th*, 1884.

SIR,—Since they have adopted in France the 'diapason normal,' I have advised that this example should be followed with us, and I have formally asked the orchestras of different towns in Italy, among others that of La Scala, to lower the pitch by putting it in tune with the French "diapason normal." If the Musical Commission instituted by our Government thinks that, to suit mathematical requirements, the eight hundred and seventy vibrations of the French diapason should be reduced to eight hundred and sixty-four, the difference is so small, almost imperceptible to the ear, that I fully agree to it.

It would be a grave, a very grave mistake to adopt, as was proposed in Rome, a diapason of nine hundred! I join also in the opinion expressed by the Commission that the lowering of the pitch takes nothing away from the sonorousness and brilliancy of the performance; but that, on the contrary, it yields something of greater nobleness, of greater fulness, of greater majesty than the harshness of too high a pitch is capable of.

For my own part, I wish that a single pitch were adopted by the whole musical universe. The language of music is universal; why, then, should the note which is called A in Paris or Milan become B flat in Rome?

I have the honour to sign myself,

Your devoted

G. VERDI.

I have said that Verdi had a horror of *posing*, of making an exhibition of himself, of putting himself in evidence, of which many artists, on

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the contrary, are so greedy. Perhaps he even pushes this feeling a little to excess. In any case, here is one of the best proofs of the little desire he shows to occupy the public with himself personally, apart from his works. Some years back, when it was proposed to publish in Italy a collection of letters of Rossini (this proposal was unfortunately not carried through), the idea was started of asking Verdi to write a letter by way of preface. The composer of *Rigoletto* declined this request absolutely, and this is what the great patriot and writer Guerazzi, author of *L'Assedio di Firenze*, of *Isabella Orsini*, and of *Beatrice Cenci*, wrote on the subject to Signor Guidicini, who was to have been the editor of the proposed collection :—

My dear Signor Guidicini,—When you announced to me the intention of publishing the letters of Rossini, it gave me deep satisfaction, so delighted am I with everything which may conduce to the glory of Italy. I now learn from you that it has not been possible to obtain from the illustrious Verdi a letter to adorn the collection of Rossini. This astonishes me—I will say more, this grieves me, for great geniuses ought to help each other; a double brotherhood unites them, that of humanity and that of intelligence. Envy is the action of unworthy and incapable persons, and Verdi is generous and great. Perhaps (I know nothing on the subject) Rossini may have criticised Verdi with little

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justice, and a want of discretion; all the more reason why Verdi should show towards Rossini a liberal spirit. I have not the honour of knowing Signor Verdi; but if I were in a position to do so, I would entreat him to write a word on the Pesarese. I look on myself as an outsider in the science of music; but in any case I should like to find out for what reason Rossini, as skilful as any one in elaborate and brilliant instrumental music, always declared himself a lover of melody, of quiet accompaniments, and of pleasing sounds, and I should like to investigate how far these principles are apparent in his last compositions.

Your affectionate
F. D. GUERAZZI.

Guerazzi was assuredly mistaken in supposing that the refusal of Verdi proceeded either from rancour caused by certain jokes, more or less piquant, which Rossini allowed himself in regard to him, or from the shade which the glory of the immortal composer of *Il Barbiere* and of *Guillaume Tell* might cast on his own reputation. Verdi had proved in advance that it was nothing of that sort, by the project which he had himself formed, on the death of Rossini, of suggesting in honour of the master a Mass in which all the pieces were to have been furnished by the most renowned composers of the present day in Italy, including himself. We must, therefore, only see in this refusal what was really the case: his repugnance to write

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anything whatever except music which was intended for publication, and his horror, perhaps exaggerated, for everything which would put him in evidence.[1]

Among Verdi's letters, I have found another which is interesting from an artistic point of view. It was addressed to a dramatic poet, Signor Giuseppe Cencetti, in reference to the immediate reopening of one of the theatres in Rome, and was published by several Italian newspapers in the month of July, 1873 :—

My dear Cencetti,—I am aware that in Rome they are proposing to reorganise the theatre, and I wish these reformers were fully impressed by this fact, that modern melodrama (that is to say, the opera) has requirements very different from those of former times, and that to obtain success it is indispensable to have a perfect *ensemble;* it thus becomes necessary to entrust the direction to two men only, both capable and energetic: to one all the musical department—singers, orchestra, chorus, etc., etc.; to the other the scenic department—costumes, accessories, *mise en scène*,[2] etc., etc. These alone should be the arbiters of everything, and should assume the completest responsibility. It

[1] This is the place to recall the truly original saying, which has been attributed to Rossini, by which he characterised the musical temperament, energetic even to violence, of the composer of *Trovatore* and *Rigoletto*. When people spoke to him of the latter, he never failed to say, with his knowing air :—"Ah ! oui, Verdi, oune mousicienne qui a oune casque !" —"a musician with a helmet."

[2] In French in the original.

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is by these means only that good execution and success can be obtained.

To you, whom I have known for so many years, I desire that the cares of the scenic direction should be entrusted, persuaded as I am that all your efforts will aim at presenting operas according to our intentions.

Adieu, and believe me always,

Yours,

G. VERDI.[1]

This book, I have said, has no conclusion.

[1] Here is one more letter, in this case a trifle humorous. It was addressed by the master to one of my Italian *confrères*, M. Filippo Filippi, musical critic of the *Perseveranza* of Milan:—

"BUSSETO, SANT'-AGATA, *September 26th*, 1865.

"DEAR SIGNOR FILIPPI,—Having been absent from home for five or six days, I have heard nothing more about the nomination of deputy here; but I know that Scolari has been proposed, and he has great chances of success.

"If you honour me with a visit, your powers as a biographer, even supposing you desired to exercise them, would find very little to relate about the *marvels of Sant'-Agata*—four walls to protect one from the sun and rough weather; a few dozen of trees, planted principally by my own hands; a pond which I shall honour with the title of lake when I have water enough to fill it, etc., etc.

"All this without design, without architectural order, not because I am not fond of architecture, but because I detest things which jar among themselves, and because it would have been folly to do anything artistic in so unpoetic a spot. Therefore take my advice; forget for the nonce that you are a biographer.

"I know that you are an ardent and excellent *musician*, but, *ohimé!* Piave and Mariani will have told you that at Sant'-Agata we never make music, nor talk about it, and you run the risk of perhaps finding a pianoforte not only out of tune, but without strings.

"Thanking you, nevertheless, for the courteous letter which you have been so kind to write to me,

"I remain, your affectionate

"G. VERDI."

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It cannot have one, for, although at present seventy-two years of age, the illustrious artist who is the subject of it is still, happily, full of life and health. Possibly, even in spite of this great age, Verdi may not have completed his artistic career; perhaps he is reserving for us a great surprise, I mean a last work, and, in fact, people have been talking of late of an *Iago* which he was supposed to have written, or to be about to write, on the subject of *Otello*. It would certainly be interesting, whatever might be the value of this work viewed as absolute music, to be able to compare this *Iago* with the *Otello* which Rossini brought out in 1816. But Verdi, who is not, like our musicians, in the habit of confiding his projects to the four winds of heaven, Verdi, the impenetrable, has allowed newsmongers to speculate to their own satisfaction on this subject, without supporting it in any way, without even indirectly giving matter for any indiscretion whatever. No one can possibly say at the present time if we are some day to hear *Iago*, and very knowing would he be who ventured to give us the shadow of information on the subject.[1]

[1] [It appears that public curiosity on this subject is at last to be satisfied. I copy the following from the *Times* of October 11th :—

"*Verdi's Last Opera.*—A letter from Milan states that preparations are being actively pushed forward at La Scala for

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I shall finish, then, without concluding, and to wind up this purely anecdotic recital I will confine myself to reproducing here the moral portrait, at the same time powerful, strange, and accurate, which Guerazzi, one of his warmest admirers and a literary glory of nineteenth century Italy, has drawn of Verdi.[1]

". . . I am acquainted neither with the feelings, nor the affections, nor even the features

the production of Verdi's new opera. The designs for the scenery, decorations, and costumes are completed. Signor Faccio, the director of the orchestra, has been to Sant'-Agata, on a visit to the composer, and has carefully examined the score with him. He speaks enthusiastically of the work. The singers who are to create the parts at the first representation —Madame Pantaleoni, Signori Tamagino, Maurel, and Novarrini—are to go to Sant'-Agata shortly, in order to study their parts under Verdi's superintendence. There is no overture, only a symphonic introduction descriptive of a storm. The libretto, the work of Boito, the author of *Mefistofele*, is said to follow Shakespeare's lines very closely, and is represented as much above the ordinary level of such works. It would appear that the title of the work has not been settled. For a long time it was talked about under the name of *Iago;* now it would seem that Verdi inclines to retain the name of *Otello*. One of Rossini's most esteemed operas bears this name."

It appears also, according to the Milanese journal *Il Trovatore*, that the directors of the Paris Opera have requested Verdi to undertake, for production in the year of the Exhibition in that city—1889—a new opera which should have some reference to the centenary of the Revolution, but that the composer has declined the proposition.—J. E. M.]

[1] This nervous and highly coloured language reflects marvellously the sentiments which distinguish in a remarkable manner the philosophic temperament of Guerazzi, an ardent and almost stern republicanism, a lofty contempt of the greatness of this world, and the most complete disdain for material power, added to an exaltation as lively as it is legitimate of intellectual power and of the higher faculties of man.

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of Giuseppe Verdi, yet I feel myself drawn towards him

'Com' uom che per fama s'innamora,'[1]

and report, if, indeed, it speaks the truth, represents him to me as a man of austere intellect; severe towards others and towards himself; master or husband of his muse rather than her lover; a great enthusiast of the independence of life; fearing to bestow praise as much as he fears to receive it, so that one cannot say which he detests the most, the part of flatterer or that of the object of flattery, and one may say that his hatred for both is equal. As to the distinctions with which even the unworthy adorn themselves, he seeks them as a dog seeks the blows of a stick, and he laughs, as he has a right to laugh, at those mighty ones of the day and chance who, in their shameless self-satisfaction, seriously imagine that they are awarding titles of immortality to men already immortal. When Verdi wants laurels, he can plant and cultivate them himself at home; and if he is pleased to surround himself with splendour, he knows how with his own genius to create rays of glory for himself. . . . As a man who knows that he is really great, Verdi avoids courts, being well aware that to penetrate into these

[1] "As a man who falls in love from report." (The quotation is from Dante.)

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paltry chambers, one must bend one's self as those were compelled to do who entered the *Stinche*."[1]

This portrait is striking, and it may be said that, without knowing him, Guerazzi has formed a true estimate of his countryman, and that he has painted him with the hand of a master.

[1] The Stinche, the ancient prison for debt in Florence.

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APPENDIX.

THE reader will find here, not without satisfaction, the catalogue of the compositions of Verdi. This catalogue is, I think, as accurate and as complete as possible, and comprises, not only the works of the master for the theatre, but also all the compositions of different kinds written by him not for the stage.

DRAMATIC MUSIC.

1. *Oberto, Comte di San Bonifacio* (poem by Felice Romani), Milan, Theatre of La Scala, November 17th, 1839.
2. *Un Giorno di Regno* (poem by Felice Romani), Milan, La Scala, September 5th, 1840. (Has been sometimes performed under the title of *Il Finto Stanislao.*)
3. *Nabucco* (poem by Solera), Milan, La Scala, March 9th, 1842.
4. *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata* (poem by Solera), Milan, La Scala, February 11th, 1843.
5. *Ernani* (poem by Piave), Venice, Theatre of La Fenice, March 9th, 1844.
6. *I Due Foscari* (poem by Piave), Rome, Argentina Theatre, November 3rd, 1844.
7. *Giovanna d'Arco* (poem by Solera), Milan, La Scala, February 15th, 1845.
8. *Alzira* (poem by Salvatore Cammarano), Naples, San Carlo Theatre, August 12th, 1845.
9. *Attila* (poem by Solera), Venice, La Fenice, March 17th, 1846.
10. *Macbeth* (poem by Piave), Florence, Theatre of La Per-

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gola, March 14th, 1847. (Adapted for the French stage, this work was represented in Paris, at the Théâtre Lyrique, April 21st, 1865, to a libretto by MM. Ch. Nuitter and Beaumont. It was not, like *Luisa Miller*, *La Traviata*, and *Un Ballo in Maschera*, simply a translation; the score of *Macbeth* was largely rewritten for the performance in Paris, and since then it has happened that in Italy they have played *Macbeth* with the French musical version.)

11. *I Masnadieri* (poem by Andrea Maffei), London, Her Majesty's Theatre, July 22nd, 1847. (Translated into French under the title *Les Brigands*, and played in Paris, at the Théâtre de l'Athénée, February 3rd, 1870.)
12. *Jérusalem* (French words by Alphonse Royer and Gustave Waez), Paris, the Opera, November 26th, 1847. (A revised, corrected, and considerably enlarged edition of *I Lombardi*.)
13. *Il Corsaro* (poem by Piave), Trieste, Grand Theatre, October 25th, 1848.
14. *La Battaglia di Legnano* (poem by Cammarano), Rome, Argentina Theatre, January 27th, 1849.
15. *Luisa Miller* (poem by Cammarano), Naples, San Carlo, December 8th, 1849. (Translated into French, and played under the same title at the Opera, February 2nd, 1863.)
16. *Stiffelio* (poem by Piave), Trieste, Grand Theatre, November 16th, 1850.
17. *Rigoletto* (poem by Piave), Venice, La Fenice, March 11th, 1851. (Translated into French, and played under the same title at the Théâtre Lyrique, December 24th, 1863, and at the Opera, February 27th, 1885.)
18. *Il Trovatore* (poem by Cammarano), Rome, Apollo Theatre, January 19th, 1853. (Translated into French under the title *Le Trouvère*, and performed at the Opera, January 12th, 1857.)
19. *La Traviata* (poem by Piave), Venice, La Fenice, March 6th, 1853. (Translated into French under the title *Violetta*, and performed at the Théâtre Lyrique, October 17th, 1864.
20. *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* (poem by Scribe and Duveyrier),

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Paris, Opera, June 13th, 1855. (Translated into Italian and subsequently performed in Italy, at first under the title *Giovanna di Guzman*, then under that of *I Vespri Siciliani*.)

21. *Simon Boccanegra* (poem by Piave), Venice, La Fenice, March 12th, 1857. (This work, in great measure re-written, to a poem completely written anew by Signor Arrigo Boito, appeared under this new form at La Scala at Milan in 1881.)
22. *Aroldo* (poem by Piave), Rimini, Teatro Novo, August 16th, 1857. (New edition, considerably modified, to a new poem, with an additional act, of the score of *Stiffelio*.)
23. *Un Ballo in Maschera* (anonymous poem [by Somma]), Rome, Apollo Theatre, February 17th, 1859. (Translated into French under the title *Le Bal Masqué*, and performed at the Théâtre Lyrique, November 17th, 1869.)
24. *La Forza del Destino* (poem by Piave), St. Petersburg, Imperial Theatre, November 10th, 1862.
25. *Don Carlos* (poem by Méry and Camille du Locle), Paris, Opera, March 11th, 1867. (Translated and performed in Italy under the title of *Don Carlo*.)
26. *Aïda* (poem by MM. Ghislanzoni and Camille du Locle), Cairo, Italian Theatre, December 24th, 1871. (Translated into French by MM. du Locle and Nuitter, and performed under the same title at the Opera, March 22nd, 1880.)

Inno delle Nazioni, written for the Universal Exhibition of London, and executed in that city, at Her Majesty's Theatre, May 24th, 1862.

SACRED MUSIC.

Requiem Mass, written for the anniversary of the death of Alessandro Manzoni, performed for the first time at Milan, in the Church of San Marco, May 22nd, 1874.

Paternoster, translated into Italian by Dante, for five-part chorus (two sopranos, contralto, tenor, and bass).

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Ave Maria, translated into Italian by Dante, for soprano voice, with accompaniment of string quartet; performed for the first time April 18th, 1880, at a concert of the Orchestral Society of the La Scala Theatre at Milan.

VOCAL MUSIC.

SIX ROMANCES:

1. *Non t'accostare all' Urna.*
2. *More, Elisa, lo stanco Poeta.*
3. *In solitaria Stanza.*
4. *Nell' Orror di Notte oscura.*
5. *Perduta ho la Pace.*
6. *Deh! Pietoso.*

ALBUM OF SIX ROMANCES:

1. *Il Tramonto.* Words by Maffei.
2. *La Zingara.* Words by Maggioni.
3. *Ad una Stella.* Words by Maffei.
4. *Lo Spazzacammino.* Words by Maggioni.
5. *Il Mistero.* Words by Romani.
6. *Brindisi.* Words by Maffei.

L'Esule. Song for bass voice; words by Solera.

La Seduzione. Song for bass voice; words by Balestra.

Il Poveretto. Romance.

Tu dici che non m'ami. Stornello.

Guarda che bianca Luna. Nocturne for three voices (soprano, tenor, and bass), with accompaniment of flute *obbligato*.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC.

Quartet for two violins, viola, and violoncello, written at Naples, and performed at the composer's house, April 1st, 1873.

SUNDRY COMPOSITIONS.

The compositions under this head have remained entirely unpublished, and I cannot do better in regard to them than to translate the following note, published some years back, by the *Gazzetta Musicale* of Milan:—

"From the age of thirteen to that of eighteen, the period at

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which Verdi came to Milan to study counterpoint, he wrote a heap of compositions of all kinds: marches for band up to a round hundred; perhaps as many short symphonic pieces, which served for the church, for the theatre, or for the concert-room; five or six concertos or airs with variations for the pianoforte, which he performed himself at concerts; many serenades, cantatas, airs, a vast number of duets, trios, and various works for the church, among which is a *Stabat Mater*.

"In the three years which he passed at Milan he wrote little beyond his studies in counterpoint: two overtures which were performed at Milan at a private concert; a cantata which he had performed in the house of Count Renato Borromeo; and sundry pieces, for the greater part in the buffo style, which his master made him write for exercise, not one of which was instrumented. When he returned to his own country, he began to write marches, symphonies, vocal pieces, etc., a Mass and a complete service for vespers, three or four *Tantum ergo*, and some other religious pieces. . Among the vocal compositions are the choruses to the *Tragedies of Manzoni*, for three voices, and *Il Cinque Maggio* (of the same poet), for solo voice. All these are lost, with the exception of a few symphonies which are still performed at Busseto, the native country of the composer, and the pieces composed to the poems of Manzoni, which Verdi has himself taken care of."

This catalogue is very complete, and I do not think that it is possible to add to it.

WORKS PUBLISHED ABOUT VERDI.

A certain number of works have been published about Verdi; here follows the list of those which have come within my knowledge:—

B. BERMANI: *Schizzi sulla Vita e sulle Opere del Maestro Giuseppe Verdi.* Milano, Ricordi, 1846. 8vo.

ABRAMO BASEVI: *Studio sulle Opere di Giuseppe Verdi.* Firenze, Tofani, 1859. 12mo.

G. PEROSIO: *Cenni Biografici su Giuseppe Verdi, seguite da breve Analisi dell' "Aïda" e della Messa da Requiem.* Milano, 1875. 8vo.

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ANTONIO PEÑA Y GOÑI: *Aïda, ensayo critico Musical.* Madrid, Iglesias et Garcia, 1875. 12mo.

VINCENZO SASSAROLI: *Considerazioni sulla Stato attuale dell'Arte Musicale in Italia e sull'Importanza Artistica dell'Opera "Aïda" e della Messa di Verdi.* Genova, 1876. 8vo.

MARCHESE G. MONALDI: *Verdi e le sue Opere.* Firenza, 1877. 8vo.

ARTURO POUGIN. *Giuseppe Verdi, Vita Aneddotica, con Note ed Aggiunte di Folchetto.* Milano, Ricordi, 1881. Small 4to, with engravings.[1]

[1] Two works concerning Verdi have still to be mentioned. One is a sort of scheme relative to the Mass which the master thought of having composed to the memory of Rossini: *Messa da Requiem Proposta da G. Verdi in 'Onore di Rossini. Norme Generali.* Milano, 1868. 8vo. The second work is an official document. Verdi had been named president of a commission charged with the investigation of the reforms to be undertaken in the conservatoires of Italy; the report of this commission, signed by Verdi, president, and by the members—Casamorata, director of the Musical Institute of Florence; Mazzucato, director of the Conservatoire of Milan; and Signor Paolo Serrao—was published under this title: *Sulla Riforma degli Istituti musicali, Relazione al Ministro della Pubblica Estruzione.* Firenze, 1871. 8vo.

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